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SHORT STORIES

Vol. 89

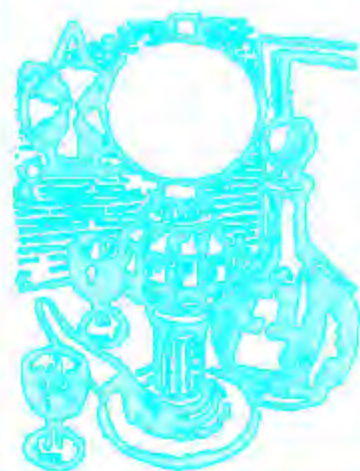
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Short Stories

by

Guy de
Maupassant



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YVETTE

I

AS THEY LEFT THE CAFÉ RICHE, JEAN DE SERVIGNY SAID TO LÉON SAVAL :

"We'll walk, if you don't mind walking. It's too fine to take a cab."

"It will suit me perfectly," answered his friend.

"It's barely eleven," continued Jean. "We shall be there long before midnight, so let us go slowly."

A restless crowd swarmed on the boulevard, the crowd which on summer nights is always to be seen there, contented and merry, walking, drinking, and talking, streaming past like a river. Here and there a café flung a brilliant splash of light on to the group which sat outside, drinking at round little tables loaded with bottles and glasses, and obstructing the hurrying crowd of passers-by. And in the road the cabs, with their red, blue, and green eyes, passed swiftly across the harsh glare of the lighted front, and for an instant revealed the silhouette of the thin, trotting horse, the profile of the driver on the box, and the dark, square body of the vehicle. The Urbaine cabs gleamed as the light caught their yellow panels.

The two friends walked slowly along, smoking their cigars. They were in evening dress, their overcoats on their arms, flowers in their buttonholes, and their hats a little on one side, with the careless tilt affected by men who have dined well and find the breeze warm.

Ever since their school-days the two had been close friends, profoundly and loyally devoted to each other.

Jean de Servigny, small, slim, slightly bald, and frail, very

elegant, with a curled moustache, bright eyes, and thin lips, was one of those night-birds who seem to have been born and bred on the boulevards; inexhaustible, though he wore a perpetual air of fatigue, vigorous despite his pallor—one of those slender Parisians to whom gymnastics, fencing, the cold plunge, and the Turkish bath have given an artificial nervous strength. He was as well known for his conviviality as for his wit, his wealth, and his love-affairs, and for that geniality, popularity, and fashionable gallantry which are the hall-mark of a certain type of man.

In other ways, too, he was a true Parisian, quick-witted, sceptical, changeable, impulsive, energetic yet irresolute, capable of anything and of nothing, an egoist on principle and a philanthropist on impulse. He kept his expenditure within his income, and amused himself without ruining his health. Cold and passionate by turns, he was continually letting himself go and pulling himself up, a prey to conflicting impulses, and yielding to all of them, following his instinct like any hardened pleasure-seeker whose weathercock logic bids him follow every wind and profit from any train of events, without taking the trouble to set a single one of them in motion.

His companion, Léon Saval, rich also, was one of those superb giants who compel women to turn round and stare after them in the street. He had the air of a statue come to life, of a racial type: he was like one of those models which are sent to exhibitions. Too handsome, too tall, too broad, too strong, all his faults were those of excess. He had broken innumerable hearts.

As they reached the Vaudeville, he inquired:

"Have you let this lady know that you're bringing me?"

Servigny laughed.

"Let the Marquise Obardi know! Do you let a bus-driver know in advance that you're going to get on to his bus at the corner of the boulevard?"

"Well, then, exactly who is she?" asked Saval, slightly perplexed.

"A parvenue," replied his friend, "a colossal fraud, a charming jade, sprung from Lord knows where, who appeared one day, Lord knows how, in the world of adventurers, in which she is well able to make herself prominent. Anyhow, what does it matter? They say her real name, her maiden-name—for she has remained a maiden in every sense but the true one—is Octavie Bardin, whence Obardi, retaining the first letter of the Christian name and dropping the last letter of the surname. She's an attractive woman, too, and with your physique you're certain to become her lover. You can't introduce Hercules to Messalina without something coming of it. I ought to add, by the way, that though admission to the place is as free as to a shop, you are not obliged to buy what is on sale. Love and cards are the stock-in-trade, but no one will force you to purchase either. The way out is as accessible as the way in.

"It is three years now since she took a house in the Quartier de l'Étoile, a rather shady district, and opened it to all the scum of the Continent, which comes to Paris to display its most diverse, dangerous, and vicious accomplishments.

"I went to the house. How? I don't remember. I went, as we all go, because there's gambling, because the women are approachable and the men scoundrels. I like this crowd of decorated buccaneers, all foreign, all noble, all titled, all, except the spies, unknown to their ambassadors. They all talk of their honour on the slightest provocation, trot out their ancestors on no provocation at all, and present you with their life-histories on any provocation. They are braggarts, liars, thieves, as dangerous as their cards, as false as their names, brave because they must be, like footpads who cannot rob their victims without risking their necks. In a word, the aristocracy of the galleys.

"I adore them. They're interesting to study, interesting

to meet, amusing to listen to, often witty, never commonplace like the dregs of French officialdom. Their wives too are always pretty, with a little flavour of foreign rascality, and the mystery of their past lives, half of which were probably spent in a penitentiary. Most often they have glorious eyes and wonderful hair, the real professional physique, a grace which intoxicates, a seductive charm that drives men mad, a vicious but wholly irresistible fascination! They're the real old high-way robbers, female birds of prey. And I adore them too.

"The Marquise Obardi is a perfect type of these elegant jades. A little over-ripe, but still beautiful, seductive, and feline, she's vicious to the marrow. There's plenty of fun in her house—gambling, dancing, supper . . . all the distractions of the world, the flesh, and the devil, in fact."

"Have you been, or are you, her lover?" asked Léon Saval.

Servigny answered:

"I haven't been, am not, and never shall be. It's the daughter I go there for."

"Oh, there's a daughter, then, is there?"

"There is indeed! She's a marvel. At present she's the principal attraction. A tall, glorious creature, just the right age, eighteen, as fair as her mother is dark, always merry, always ready for fun, always laughing at the top of her voice, and dancing like a thing possessed. Who's to have her? Who has had her? No one knows. There are ten of us waiting and hoping.

"A girl like that in the hands of a woman like the Marquise is a fortune. And they don't show their hands, the rogues. No one can make it out. Perhaps they're waiting for a catch, a better one than I am. Well, I can assure you that if the chance comes my way I'll take it.

"This girl, Yvette, absolutely nonplusses me. She's a mystery. If she isn't the most finished monster of perverse ingenuity that I've ever seen, she's certainly the most extra-

ordinary scrap of innocent girlhood to be found anywhere. She lives there among that disgraceful crew with easy and triumphant serenity, exquisitely wicked or exquisitely simple.

"She's an extraordinary girl to be the daughter of an adventuress, sprung up in that hotbed, like a beautiful plant nourished on manure, or she may be the daughter of some man of high rank, a great artist or a great nobleman, a prince or a king who found himself one night in her mother's bed. No one can understand just what she is, or what she thinks about. But you will see her."

Saval shouted with laughter.

"You're in love with her," he said.

"No, I am one of the competitors, which is not the same thing. By the way, I'll introduce you to my most serious rivals. But I have a real chance. I have a good start, and she regards me with favour."

"You're in love," repeated Saval.

"No, I'm not. She disturbs me, allures me and makes me uneasy, at once attracts me and frightens me. I distrust her as I would a trap, yet I long for her with the longing of a thirsty man for a cool drink. I feel her charm, and draw near it as nervously as if I were in the same room with a man suspected of being a clever thief. In her presence I feel an almost absurd inclination to believe in the possibility of her innocence, and a very reasonable distrust of her equally possible cunning. I feel that I am in contact with an abnormal being, a creature outside the laws of nature, delicious or detestable, I don't know."

For the third time Saval declared:

"You're in love, I tell you. You speak of her with the fervour of a poet and the lyricism of a troubadour. Come now, have it out with yourself, search your heart and admit it."

"Well, it may be so, after all. At least she's always in my mind. Yes, perhaps I am in love. I think of her too much. I think of her when I'm falling asleep and when I wake up;—

that's fairly serious. Her image haunts me, pursues me, is with me the whole time, in front of me, round me, in me. Is it love, this physical obsession? Her face is so sharply graven in my mind that I see it the moment I shut my eyes. I don't deny that my pulses race whenever I see her. I love her, then, but in an odd fashion. I long for her passionately, yet the idea of making her my wife would seem to me a monstrous, absurd folly. I am also a little afraid of her, like a bird swooped upon by a hawk. And I'm jealous of her too, jealous of all that is hidden from me in her incomprehensible heart. I'm always asking myself: 'Is she a delightful little guttersnipe or a thoroughly bad lot?' She says things that would make a trooper blush, but so do parrots. Sometimes she's so brazenly indecent that I'm inclined to believe in her absolute purity, and sometimes her artlessness is so much too good to be true that I wonder if she ever was chaste. She provokes me and excites me like a harlot, and guards herself at the same time as though she were a virgin. She appears to love me, and laughs at me; in public she almost proclaims herself my mistress, and when we're alone together she treats me as though I were her brother or her footman.

"Sometimes I imagine that she has as many lovers as her mother. Sometimes I think that she knows nothing about life, absolutely nothing.

"And she has a passion for reading novels. At present, while waiting for a more amusing position, I am her bookseller. She calls me her librarian.

"Every week the Librairie Nouvelle sends her, from me, everything that has appeared; I believe she reads through the whole lot.

"It must make a strange hotchpotch in her head.

"This literary taste may account for some of her queer ways. When you see life through a maze of fifteen thousand novels, you must get a queer impression of things and see them from an odd angle.

"As for me, I wait. It is certainly true that I have never felt towards any woman as I feel towards her.

"It's equally certain that I shall never marry her.

"If she has had lovers, I shall make one more. If she has not, I shall be the first to take my seat in the train.

"It's all very simple. She can't possibly marry, ever. Who would marry the daughter of the Marquise Obardi, Octavie Bardin? Clearly, no one, for any number of reasons.

"Where could she find a husband? In society? Never; the mother's house is a public resort, and the daughter attracts the clients. One can't marry into a family like that. In the middle classes, then? Even less. Besides, the Marquise has a good head on her shoulders; she'd never give Yvette to anyone but a man of rank, and she'll never find him.

"In the lower classes, perhaps? Still less possible. There's no way out of it, then. The girl belongs neither to society nor to the middle class, nor to the lower classes, nor would marriage jockey her into any one of them. She belongs, by her parentage, her birth, her upbringing, heredity, manners, habits, to the world of gilded prostitution.

"She can't escape unless she becomes a nun, which is very unlikely, seeing that her manners and tastes are already what they are. So she has only one possible profession—love. That's where she'll go, if she has not already gone. She can't escape her destiny. From being a young girl, she'll become just a—'woman.' And I should very much like to be the man who brings about the transformation.

"I am waiting. There are any number of lovers. You'll come across a Frenchman, Monsieur de Belvigne, a Russian who calls himself Prince Kravalow, and an Italian, Chevalier Valréali. These have all definitely entered themselves for the race, and are already training. There are also a number of camp-followers of less account.

"The Marquise is on the look-out. But I fancy she has her

eye on me. She knows I'm very rich and she knows less about the others.

"Her house is the most extraordinary place of the kind that I have ever seen. You meet some very decent fellows there; we're going ourselves and we shall not be the only ones. As for the women, she has come across, or rather picked out, the choicest fruit on the professional stall. Lord knows where she found them. And she was magnificently inspired to make a point of taking those who had children of their own, daughters for choice. The result is that a greenhorn might think the house was full of honest women!"

They had reached the Avenue of the Champs Élysées. A faint breeze whispered among the leaves, and was now and again wafted against their faces, like the soft breath of a giant fan swinging somewhere in the sky. Mute shadows drifted under the trees, others were visible as dark blots on the benches. And all these shadows spoke in very low tones, as though confiding important or shameful secrets.

"You cannot imagine," went on Servigny, "what a collection of fancy titles you come across in this rabbit-warren. By the way, I hope you know I'm going to introduce you as Count Saval. Saval by itself would not be at all popular, I assure you."

"No, damn it, certainly not!" cried his friend. "I'm hanged if anyone is going to think me fool enough to scrape up a comic-opera title even for 'one night only,' and for that crowd. With your leave, we'll cut that out."

Servigny laughed.

"You old idiot! Why, I've been christened the Duc de Servigny. I don't know how or why it was done. I have just always been the Duc de Servigny; I never made trouble about it. It's no discomfort. Why, without it I should be utterly looked down on!"

But Saval was not to be persuaded.

"You're a nobleman, you can carry it off. As for me, I

shall remain, for better or worse, the only commoner in the place. That will be my mark of distinctive superiority."

But Servigny was obstinate.

"I tell you it can't be done, absolutely cannot be done. It would be positively indecent. You would be like a rag-and-bone man at an assemblage of emperors. Leave it to me; I'll introduce you as the Viceroy of Upper Mississippi, and no one will be surprised. If you're going to go in for titles, you might as well do it with an air."

"No; once more, I tell you I won't have it."

"Very well, then. I was a fool really to try persuading you, for I defy you to get in without someone decorating you with a title; it's like those shops a lady can't pass without being given a bunch of violets at the door-step."

They turned to the right down the Rue de Berri, climbed to the first floor of a fine modern mansion, and left their coats and sticks in the hands of four flunkeys in knee-breeches. The air was heavy with the warm festive odour of flowers, scent, and women; and a ceaseless murmur of voices, loud and confused, came from the crowded rooms beyond.

A sort of master of ceremonies, a tall, upright, solemn, pot-bellied man, with a face framed in white whiskers, approached the new-comers and, making a short, stiff bow, asked:

"What name, please?"

"Monsieur Saval," replied Servigny.

Whereupon the man flung open the door and in a loud voice announced to the crowd of guests:

"Monsieur le Duc de Servigny. Monsieur le Baron Saval."

The first room was full of women. The eye was filled at once by a vast vision of bare bosoms lifting from billows of white lace.

The lady of the house stood talking to three friends; she turned and came forward with stately steps, grace in her bearing and a smile upon her lips.

Her low, narrow forehead was entirely hidden by masses

mere sight of her as she walked, moved, bent her head or raised her arm.

"Ah, Muscade," she repeated. "How are you, Muscade?"

Servigny shook her hand vigorously, as though she were a man, and said:

"This is my friend, Baron Saval, Mam'selle Yvette."

She greeted the new-comer, then stared at him.

"How do you do? Are you always as tall as this?"

"Oh, no, Mam'selle," answered Servigny, in the mocking tone he used to conceal his uneasiness in her presence. "He has put on his largest size to-day to please your mother, who likes quantity."

"Oh, very well, then," replied the girl in a serio-comic voice. "But when you come for my sake, please be a little smaller; I like the happy medium. Muscade here is about my size," and she offered him her little hand.

"Are you going to dance, Muscade?" she asked. "Let's dance this waltz."

Servigny made no answer, but with a sudden swift movement put his arm round her waist, and away they went like a whirlwind.

They danced faster than any, turning and twirling with wild abandon, so tightly clasped that they looked like one. Their bodies held upright and their legs almost motionless, it was as though they were spun round by an invisible machine hidden under their feet. They seemed unwearying. One by one the other couples dropped out till they were left alone, waltzing on and on. They looked as though they no longer knew where they were or what they were doing, as though they were far away from the ballroom, in ecstasy. The band played steadily on, their eyes fixed on this bewitched pair; every one was watching, and there was a burst of applause when at last they stopped.

She was rather flushed; her eyes were no longer frank, but strangely troubled, burning yet timid, unnaturally blue, with pupils unnaturally black.

Servigny was drunk with giddiness, and leaned against a door to recover his balance.

"You have a poor head, Muscade," she said. "You don't stand it as well as I do."

He smiled his nervous smile and looked at her with hungry eyes, a savage lust in his eyes and the curve of his lips.

She continued to stand in front of the young man, her throat heaving as she regained her breath.

"Sometimes," she continued, "you look just like a cat about to make a spring. Give me your arm, and let us go and find your friend."

Without speaking he offered her his arm, and they crossed the large room.

Saval was alone no longer; the Marquise Obardi had joined him, and was talking of trivial things, bewitching him with her maddening voice. Gazing intently at him, she seemed to utter words very different from those on her lips, words that came from the secret places of her heart. At the sight of Servigny she smiled and, turning to him, said:

"Have you heard, my dear Duc, that I've just taken a villa at Bougival for a couple of months? Of course you'll come and see me; you'll bring your friend, won't you? I'm going down there on Monday so will you both come and dine there next Saturday, and stay over the week-end?"

Servigny turned sharply to Yvette. She was smiling a serene, tranquil smile, and with an air of bland assurance said:

"Of course Muscade will come to dinner on Saturday; there's no need to ask him. We shall have all kinds of fun in the country."

He fancied that he saw a vague promise in her smile, and an unwonted decision in her voice.

The Marquise thereupon raised her great black eyes to Saval's face, and said:

"And you also, Baron?"

There was nothing equivocal about her smile.

He bowed.

"I shall be only too pleased."

"We'll scandalise the neighbourhood—won't we, Muscade?—and drive my admirers wild with rage," murmured Yvette, glancing, with a malice that was either candid or assured, towards the group of men who watched them from the other side of the room.

"To your heart's content, Mam'selle," replied Servigny; by way of emphasising the intimate nature of his friendship with her, he never called her "Mademoiselle."

"Why does Mademoiselle Yvette always call my friend Servigny 'Muscade'?" asked Saval.

The girl assumed an air of innocence.

"He's like the little pea that the conjurers call 'Muscade.' You think you have your finger on it, but you never have."

"Quaint children, aren't they?" the Marquise said carelessly, obviously thinking of far other things, and not for an instant lowering her eyes from Saval's face.

"I'm not quaint, I'm frank," said Yvette angrily. "I like Muscade, and he's always leaving me; it's so annoying."

Servigny made her a low bow.

"I'll never leave you again, Mam'selle, day or night."

She made a gesture of alarm.

"Oh, no, that would never do! In the day-time, by all means, but at night you'd be in the way."

"Why?" he asked imprudently.

With calm audacity she replied:

"Because I don't expect you look so nice with your clothes off."

"What a dreadful thing to say!" exclaimed the Marquise, without appearing in the least excited. "You can't possibly be so innocent as all that."

"I entirely agree with you," added Servigny in a jesting tone.

Yvette looked rather hurt, and said haughtily:

"You have just been guilty of blatant vulgarity; you

have permitted yourself far too much of that sort of thing lately."

She turned her back on him, and shouted :

"Chevalier, come and defend me ; I have just been insulted."

A thin, dark man came slowly towards them.

"Which is the culprit ?" he asked, forcing a smile.

She nodded towards Servigny.

"That's the man ; but all the same I like him better than all of you put together ; he's not so boring."

The Chevalier Valréali bowed.

"We do what we can. Perhaps we are not so brilliant, but we are at least as devoted."

A tall, stout man with grey whiskers and a deep voice was just leaving.

"Your servant, Mademoiselle Yvette," he said as he passed.

"Ah, it's Monsieur de Belvigne," she exclaimed, and turning to Saval, she introduced him.

"Another candidate for my favour, tall, fat, rich, and stupid. That's how I like them. He's a real field-marshal—one of those who hold the door open at restaurants. But you're taller than he is. Now what am I going to christen you ? I know ! I shall call you Rhodes Junior, after the colossus who must have been your father. But you two must have really interesting things to discuss, far above our heads, so good night to you."

She ran across to the orchestra, and asked them to play a quadrille.

Madame Obardi's attention seemed to be wandering.

"You're always teasing her," she said softly. "You're spoiling the child's disposition and teaching her a number of bad habits."

"Then you haven't finished her education ?" he replied.

She seemed not to understand, and continued to smile benevolently.

But observing the approach of a solemn gentleman whose breast was covered with orders, she ran up to him :

"Ah, Prince, how delightful!"

Servigny took Saval's arm once more and led him away, saying:

"There's my last serious rival, Prince Kravalow. Isn't she a glorious creature?"

"They're both glorious," replied Saval. "The mother's quite good enough for me."

Servigny bowed.

"She's yours for the asking, old chap."

The dancers elbowed them as they took their places for the quadrille, couple by couple, in two lines facing one another.

"Now let's go and watch the Greeks for a bit," said Servigny.

They entered the gambling-room.

Round each table a circle of men stood watching. There was very little conversation; sometimes a little chink of gold, thrown down on the cloth or hastily mixed up, mingled its faint metallic murmur with the murmur of the players as though the voice of gold were making itself heard amid the human voices.

The men were decorated with various orders and strange ribbons; and their diverse features all wore the same severe expression. They were more easily distinguished by their beards.

The stiff American with his horseshoe beard, the haughty Englishman with a hairy fan spread over his chest, the Spaniard with a black fleece reaching right up to his eyes, the Roman with the immense moustache bequeathed to Italy by Victor Emmanuel, the Austrian with his whiskers and clean-shaven chin, a Russian general whose lip was armed with two spears of twisted hair, Frenchmen with gay moustaches—they displayed the imaginative genius of every barber in the world.

"Aren't you going to play?" asked Servigny.

"No; what about you?"

"I never play here. Would you like to go now? We'll

came back one day when it's quieter. There are too many people here to-day ; there's nothing to be done."

"Yes, let us go."

They disappeared through a doorway which led into the hall.

As soon as they were out in the street, Servigny asked :

"Well, what do you think of it all ?"

"It's certainly interesting. But I like the women better than the men."

"Good Lord, yes ! Those women are the best hunting in the country. Don't you agree with me that love exhales from them like the perfumes from a barber's shop ? These are positively the only houses where one can really get one's money's worth. And what expert lovers they are ! What artists ! Have you ever eaten cakes made by a baker ? They look so good, and they have no flavour at all. Well, the love of an ordinary woman always reminds me of baker's pastry, whereas the love you get from women like the Marquise Obardi—that really is love ! Oh, they can make cakes all right, can these confectioners. You have to pay them two-pence halfpenny for what you would get anywhere else for a penny, that's the only thing."

"Who is the man running the place at present ?" asked Saval.

Servigny shrugged his shoulders to express utter ignorance.

"I have no idea," he said. "The last I knew certainly was an English peer, but he left three months ago. At the moment she must be living on the community, on the gambling and the gamblers, very likely, for she has her whims. But it's an understood thing, isn't it, that we are dining with her at Bougival on Saturday ? There's more freedom in the country, and I shall end by finding out what notions Yvette has in her head !"

"I ask for nothing better," replied Saval. "I'm not doing anything that day."

As they returned down the Champs Élysées, under the

embattled stars, they passed a couple lying on a bench, and Servigny murmured :

"How ridiculous, yet how utterly indispensable, is this business of love ! A commonplace, and an ecstasy, always the same and always different ! And the clown who is paying that girl a franc is only seeking the very thing I buy for ten thousand from some Obardi who is perhaps no younger or more fascinating than that drab ! What folly !"

He was silent for some minutes, then said :

"All the same. it wouldn't be a poor thing to be Yvette's first lover. For that I'd give . . . I'd give. . . ."

He did not make up his mind what he would give. And Saval bade him good night at the corner of the Rue Royale.

II

The table had been laid on the veranda that overlooked the river. Villa Printemps, the house that the Marquise Obardi had taken, stood half-way up the hillside, just where the Seine made a turn, running round in front of the garden wall and down towards Marly. Opposite the house the island of Croissy formed a background of tall trees, a mass of leafage. A long reach of the broad river was clearly visible as far as the floating café, La Grenouillère, half hidden in the branches.

Night was coming down, calm and still, after a flaming riverside sunset ; one of those tranquil evenings that bring with them a vague sense of happiness. Not a breath of air stirred the branches, no gust of wind disturbed the smooth, translucent surface of the Seine. The air was warm, but not too hot ; it was good to be alive. The grateful coolness of the river banks rose to the quiet sky.

The sun was disappearing behind the trees, wheeling towards other lands. The serene calm of the sleeping earth soothed

the visitors' senses ; under the vast quiet dome of the sky they felt the effortless surge of universal life.

The scene enchanted them when they came out of the drawing-room and sat down at the dinner-table. A tender gaiety filled their hearts ; they all felt it very good to be dining out there in the country with that broad river and glorious sunset for scenery, and breathing that limpid, heady air.

The Marquise had taken Saval's arm, Yvette Servigny's.

These four made up the little party.

The two women were not in the least like their Parisian selves. Yvette was the more altered of the two ; she spoke very little, and seemed tired and grave.

Saval hardly recognised her, and asked :

"What's the matter with you, Mademoiselle ? I find you very changed since last week. You have become quite a reasonable being."

"It's the effect of the country," she answered. "I am not the same here ; I feel quite strange. And besides, I never am the same two days together. To-day I behave like a lunatic, to-morrow I'll be like a funeral oration ; I change like the weather, I don't know why. I'm capable of absolutely anything—at the right time. There are days when I could kill people ; not animals—I could never kill animals—but people, certainly ; and then there are days when I cry for just nothing. A hundred different ideas rush through my head. It depends, too, on my feeling when I get up in the morning. Every morning when I wake up I know just what I shall be like all day. Perhaps our dreams decide that sort of thing. Partly it depends on the book I have just been reading."

She was dressed in white flannel ; the soft, delicate folds of material covered her from head to foot. The bodice was loose, with big pleats, and suggested, without too rigidly defining, the firm sweeping contour of her already well-formed bosom. Her slender neck rose from fold upon fold of frothy lace, drooping languidly, its warm gleaming flesh even whiter than

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her dress and weighed down with its heavy burden of golden hair.

For a long minute Servigny gazed at her, then said :

"You are adorable to-night, Mam'selle—I wish I could always see you like that."

"Don't propose to me, Muscade," she said, with a touch of her wonted archness. "On a day like this I should take you at your word, and that might cost you dear."

The Marquise looked happy, very happy. She was dressed severely in black ; the fine folds of the gown set off the superb, massive lines of her figure. There was a touch of red in the bodice, a spray of red carnations fell from her waist and was caught up at her side, a red rose was fastened in her dark hair. There was a flame in her to-night, in her whole being, in the simple dress with the blood-red blossoms, in the glance that lingered on her neighbour, in her slow voice, in her rare movements.

Saval, too, was grave and preoccupied. From time to time, with a gesture familiar to him, he stroked his brown Vandyke beard, and seemed sunk in thought.

For some moments no one spoke.

"There is sometimes a saving grace in silence," said Servigny at last, as the trout was being handed. "One often feels nearer one's fellow-creatures when silent than when speaking ; isn't that so, Marquise ?"

She turned slightly towards him and replied :

"Yes, it's true. It is so sweet to think together of the same delightful thing."

She turned her burning gaze on Saval ; for some moments they remained looking into one another's eyes. There was a slight, an almost imperceptible movement under the table.

"Mam'selle Yvette," continued Servigny, "you'll make me think you're in love if you continue to behave so beautifully. Now with whom can you be in love ? Let's think it out together. I leave the vulgar herd of sighing swains on one

side and go straight for the principals. How about Prince Kravalow?"

At this name Yvette was roused.

"My poor dear Muscade, what *are* you thinking about? The Prince looks like a Russian in the waxworks, who has won a medal at a hairdressers' competition."

"Very well. The Prince is out of it. Perhaps you have chosen the Vicomte Pierre de Belvigne?"

This time she broke into a fit of laughter and asked:

"Can you see me hanging round Raisiné's neck"—she called him Raisiné, Malvoisie, or Argenteuil, according to the day of the week, for she nicknamed every one—"and whispering in his ear: 'My dear little Pierre,' or 'My divine Pedro, my adored Pietri, my darling Pierrot, give your dear fat poodle-head to your darling little wife because she wants to kiss it'?"

"Away with Number Two, then," said Servigny. "We are left with the Chevalier Valréali, whom the Marquise seems to favour."

Yvette was as much amused as before.

"What, Old Lachrymose? Why, he's a professional mourner at the Madeleine; he follows all the high-class funerals. Whenever he looks at me I feel as though I were already dead."

"That's three. Then you've fallen hopelessly in love with Baron Saval, here present."

"With Rhodes Junior? No, he's too strong. It would feel like being in love with the Arc de Triomphe de l'Étoile."

"Well, then, Mam'selle, it is plain that you're in love with me, for I'm the only one of your worshippers that we haven't already dealt with. I had kept myself to the end, out of modesty and prudence. It only remains for me to thank you."

"You, Muscade!" she replied with charming gaiety. "Oh, no, I like you very much . . . but I don't love you. . . . Wait, I don't want to discourage you. I don't love you yet. . . . You have a chance . . . perhaps. . . . Persevere, Muscade, be devoted, ardent, obedient, take plenty of trouble and all

possible precautions, obey my lightest whims, be prepared to do anything I may choose . . . and we'll see . . . later."

"But, Mam'selle, I'd rather do all this for you after than before, if you don't mind."

"After what . . . Muscade?" she asked him with the ingenuous air of a soubrette.

"Why, deuce take it, after you've shown me that you love me."

"Well, behave as though I did, and believe it if you want to."

"But, I must say. . . ."

"Be quiet, Muscade. That's enough about it for this time."

He made her a military salute and held his tongue.

The sun had gone down behind the island, but the sky still glowed like a brazier, and the quiet water of the river was as though changed to blood. The sunset spilled a burning light over houses, people, everything; the scarlet rose in the Marquise's hair was like a drop of crimson fallen upon her head from the clouds.

Yvette was looking into the distance; her mother laid her hand on Saval's, as though by accident. But the young girl turned, and the Marquise quickly snatched away her hand and fumbled at the folds of her bodice.

Servigny, who was watching them, said:

"If you like, Mam'selle, we'll go for a walk on the island after dinner."

She was delighted with the idea.

"Oh, yes; that will be lovely; we'll go by ourselves, won't we, Muscade?"

"Yes, all by ourselves, Mam'selle."

Once more they were silent.

The calm of the wide landscape, the restful slumber of eventide weighed on their hearts, their bodies, their voices. There are rare, quiet hours wherein speech is almost impossible. The servants moved noiselessly about. The flaming sky burnt low; slowly night folded the earth in shadow.

"Do you propose to stay here long?" asked Saval.

"Yes," replied the Marquise, dwelling upon each word, "for just as long as I'm happy here."

As it was now too dark to see, lamps were brought. They flung across the table a strange, pale light in the hollow darkness. A rain of little flies began falling upon the cloth. They were tiny midges, burnt as they flew over the glass chimneys of the lamps; their wings and legs singed, they powdered the table-lipen, the plates, and the glasses with a grey, creeping dust. The diners swallowed them in their wine, ate them in the sauces, watched them crawling over the bread. Their faces and hands were perpetually tickled by a flying swarm of innumerable tiny insects.

The wine had constantly to be thrown away, the plates covered; they took infinite precautions to protect the food they were eating. Yvette was amused at the game; Servigny carefully sheltered whatever she was raising to her lips, guarded the wine-glass and held his napkin spread out over her head like a roof. But it was too much for the fastidious nerves of the Marquise, and the meal was hastily brought to an end.

"Now let's go to the island," said Yvette, who had not forgotten Servigny's suggestion.

"Don't stay long, will you?" advised her mother languidly.

"We'll come with you as far as the ferry."

They went off along the tow-path, still two and two, the young girl in front with her friend. They could hear the Marquise and Saval behind them talking very fast in very low voices. All round them was black, a thick, inky blackness. But the sky, swarming with seeds of fire, seemed to spill them out on the river, for the dark water was richly patined with stars.

By this time the frogs were croaking; all along the banks their rolling, monotonous notes creaked out.

The soft voices of innumerable nightingales rose in the still air.

Yvette remarked abruptly :

"Hallo ! They are no longer following us. Where are they ?"

And she called : "Mother !"

There was no answer. "They can't be far away," continued the young girl. "I heard them a moment ago."

"They must have gone back," murmured Servigny. "Perhaps your mother was cold." He led her on.

A light shone in front of them ; it was the inn of Martinet, a fisherman who also ran a tavern. At their call a man came out of the house, and they boarded a large boat moored in the grasses on the bank. The ferryman took up his oars, and the heavy boat advanced, waking the stars slumbering on the water and rousing them to a frenzied dancing that died slowly down in their wake. They touched the other bank and stepped off under the tall trees. The coolness of the moist earth floated up under the high, thick branches that seemed to bear as many nightingales as leaves. A distant piano began to play a popular waltz.

Servigny had taken Yvette's arm ; very softly he slipped his hand behind her waist and pressed it gently.

"What are you thinking of ?" he asked.

"I ? . . . Nothing, I'm so happy."

"Then you don't care for me ?"

"Yes, I do, Muscade. I care for you, I care for you a great deal ; only don't talk about it now. It's too beautiful here to listen to your nonsense."

He clasped her to him, though she strove, with little struggles, to free herself ; through the flannel, so soft and fleecy to the touch, he could feel the warmth of her body.

"Yvette," he stammered.

"Yes ; what is it ?"

"It's . . . I who care for you."

"You . . . don't mean that, Muscade."

"Yes, I do ; I've cared for you for a very long time."

She was still struggling to get away, striving to free her arm caught between their two bodies. They walked with difficulty, hampered by this link and by her struggles, zigzagging like a couple of drunkards.

He did not know what to say to her now, well aware that it is impossible to use to a young girl the words one would use to a grown woman; he was worried, wondering what he could do, wondering if she consented or did not understand, at his wits' end for words that would be at once tender, discreet, and unmistakable.

Every second he repeated :

"Yvette! Speak to me, Yvette!"

Suddenly he pressed an audacious kiss on her cheek. She made a little movement of withdrawal, and said in a vexed tone :

"Oh! How absurd you are. Will you leave me alone?"

Her voice revealed nothing of her thoughts and wishes; he saw that she was not too angry, and he stooped his lips to the nape of her neck, on the first few downy golden hairs, the adorable spot he had coveted so long.

Then she struggled with all her might to get free. But he held her firmly, and placing his other hand on her shoulder, forced her head round towards him, and took from her mouth a long, maddening kiss. She slipped between his arms with a quick twist of her whole body, stooped swiftly, and having thus dexterously escaped from his embrace, vanished in the darkness with a sharp rustling of petticoats like the whirl of a bird rising.

At first he remained motionless, stunned by her quickness and by her disappearance; then, hearing no further sound, he called in a low voice :

"Yvette!"

There was no answer; he began to walk on, ransacking the darkness with his eyes, searching in the bushes for the white patch that her dress must make. All was dark. He called again more loudly :

"Mam'selle Yvette!"

The nightingales were silent.

He hurried on, vaguely uneasy, calling ever louder and louder:

"Mam'selle Yvette! Mam'selle Yvette!"

Nothing! He stopped, listened. The whole island was silent; there was barely a rustle in the leaves overhead. The frogs alone kept up their sonorous croaking on the banks.

He wandered from copse to copse, descending first to the steep wooded slope of the swift main stream, then returning to the bare flat bank of the backwater. He went right up until he was opposite Bougival, then came back to the café La Grenouillère, hunting through all the thickets, constantly crying:

"Mam'selle Yvette, where are you? Answer! It is only a joke. Answer me, answer me! Don't make me hunt like this."

A distant clock began to strike. He counted the strokes; it was midnight. For two hours he had been running round the island. He thought that she had probably gone home, and, very uneasy, went back, going round by the bridge.

A servant, asleep in an arm-chair, was waiting in the hall. Servigny woke him and asked:

"Is it long since Mademoiselle Yvette came in? I left her out in the country, as I had to pay a call."

"Oh, yes, your Grace," the fellow replied, "Mademoiselle came in before ten."

He walked up to his room and went to bed. But he lay with his eyes open, unable to sleep. That snatched kiss had disturbed her. What did she want? he wondered. What did she think? What did she know? How pretty she was, how tormenting! His desire, dulled by the life he had led, by all the women he had known, was reawakened by this strange child, so fresh, provoking, and inexplicable.

He heard one o'clock strike, then two. He realised that he would get no sleep that night. He was hot and wet with sweat;

he felt in his temples the quick thudding of his heart. He got up to open the window.

A cool breeze came in, and he drew long deep breaths of it. The night was utterly dark, silent, and still. But suddenly, in the darkness of the garden he caught sight of a speck of light, like a little piece of glowing coal. "Ah, a cigar," he thought. "It can't be anyone but Saval. Léon," he called softly.

"Is that you, Jean?" a voice answered.

"Yes. Wait, I'm coming down."

He dressed, went out, and joined his friend, who was smoking astride an iron chair.

"What are you doing at this time of night?"

"Having a rest," replied Saval, and laughed.

Servigny shook his head.

"I congratulate you, my dear chap. As for me, I've run my head into a wall."

"You are telling me. . . .?"

"I am telling you . . . that Yvette is not like her mother."

"What happened? Tell me all about it."

Servigny recounted his unsuccessful efforts, then continued:

"Yes, the child really worries me. Do you realise that I haven't been able to get to sleep? What a queer thing a girl is. This one looked as simple as possible, and yet she's a complete mystery. One can understand at once a woman who has lived and loved, who knows what life is like. But with a young girl, on the other hand, one can't be sure of anything at all. I'm really beginning to think she's playing the fool with me."

Saval rocked gently on his chair.

"Be careful, my dear chap," he said very slowly; "she'll get you to marry her. Remember the illustrious examples in history. That was how Mademoiselle de Montijo became Empress, and she was at least of decent family. Don't play the Napoleon."

"Have no fears about that," said Servigny. "I'm neither a

fool, nor an emperor. One has to be one or the other to lose one's head so completely. But, I say, are you sleepy ? ”

“ Not a bit.”

“ Come for a walk along the river-side, then.”

“ Very well.”

They opened the gate and started off down the river towards Marly.

It was the cool hour just before dawn, the hour of deepest sleep, deepest rest, utter quiet. Even the faint noises of the night were silent now. The nightingales sang no longer, the frogs had finished their croaking ; some unknown animal, a bird perhaps, alone broke the stillness, making a feeble sawing noise, monotonous and regular, like the working of a machine. Servigny, who had at times a touch of the poet and of the philosopher too, said abruptly :

“ Look here. This girl absolutely maddens me. In arithmetic, one and one make two. In love, one and one ought to make one, but they make two all the same. Do you know the feeling ? The savage need of absorbing a woman into oneself, or of being absorbed into her ? I don't mean the mere physical desire to embrace her, but the mental and spiritual torment to be one with another human being, to open one's whole soul, one's whole heart, to her, and to penetrate to the uttermost depths of her mind. And never, never do you really know her or discover all the fluctuations of her will, her desires, and her thoughts. Never can you make even the slightest guess at the whole of the secret, the whole mystery of the spirit come so close to you, a spirit hidden behind two eyes as clear as water, as transparent as though there were no secret behind them. A spirit speaks to you through a beloved mouth, a mouth that seems yours because you desire it so passionately ; one by one this spirit sends you its thoughts in the guise of words, and yet it remains farther from you than the stars are from one another, farther out of reach than the stars. Strange, isn't it ! ”

"I do not ask so much," replied Saval. "I do not bother to look behind the eyes. I don't care much for the inside; it's the outside I care for."

"Whatever you say, Yvette's a queer creature," murmured Servigny. "I wonder how she'll treat me in the morning."

As they reached the weir at Marly, they saw that the sky was paling. Cocks began to crow in the farmyards; the sound reached them slightly muffled by thick walls. A bird cried in a park on the left, continually repeating a simple and ridiculous little cadenza.

"Time to go back," said Saval, and they turned round.

When Servigny reached his room, the horizon gleamed rosily through the still open window. He pulled down the Venetian blinds and drew the heavy curtains across, got into bed, and at last fell asleep. And all the time he dreamt of Yvette.

A curious sound awoke him. He sat up and listened, but did not hear it again. Then suddenly there came against his shutters a rattling like hail. He jumped out of bed and ran to the window; throwing it open, he saw Yvette standing on the garden-path, throwing great handfuls of gravel in his face.

She was dressed in pink, and wore a broad-brimmed straw hat surmounted with a military plume; she was laughing with malicious mischief.

"Well, Muscade, still asleep? What *can* you have been doing last night to wake up so late? Did you have any adventures, my poor Muscade?"

"Coming, coming, Mam'selle! Just a moment, while I stick my nose into the water-jug, and I'll be down."

"Hurry up," she cried; "it's ten o'clock. And I've got a scheme to talk over with you, a plot we are going to carry out. Breakfast at eleven, you know."

He found her seated on a bench with a book on her knees, a novel. She took his arm with friendly familiarity, as frankly

and gaily as though nothing had happened the night before, and leading him to the far end of the garden, said :

"This is my plan. We're going to disobey mamma, and you shall take me presently to the Grenouillère. I want to see it. Mamma says that decent women can't go there, but I don't care whether I can or I can't. You'll take me, Muscade, won't you? We'll have such sport with the people on the river."

The fragrance of her was delightful, but he could not discover what vague, faint scent it was that hung round her. It was not one of her mother's heavy perfumes, but a delicate fragrance in which he thought he recognised a faint whiff of iris powder and perhaps a touch of verbenä.

Whence came this elusive scent—from her dress, her hair, or her skin? He was wondering about this when, as she spoke with her face very close to his, he felt her fresh breath full in his face, and found it quite as delightful. He fancied that the fleeting fragrance he had failed to recognise was the figment of his own bewitched senses, nothing but a delusive emanation from her youth and alluring grace.

"You will, won't you, Muscade?" she said. "It will be so hot after breakfast that mother won't want to go out. She's very lazy when it's hot. We'll leave her with your friend, and you shall be my escort. We'll pretend we are going to the woods. You don't know how I shall enjoy seeing the Grenouillère."

They reached the gate facing the Seine. A flood of sunlight fell on the quiet, gleaming river. A light heat-mist was lifting, the steam of evaporated water, leaving a little glittering vapour on the surface of the stream. From time to time a boat went by, a light skiff or a heavy barge, and distant whistles could be heard, the short notes of the whistles on the Sunday trains that flooded the country with Parisians, and the long warning notes of the steamboats passing the weir at Marly.

But a small bell rang for breakfast, and they went in.

The meal was eaten in silence. A heavy July noon pressed

on the earth and oppressed the spirit. The heat was almost tangible, paralysing both mind and body. The sluggish words would not leave their lips; every movement was an effort, as though the air had acquired power of resistance, and was more difficult to thrust through.

Yvette alone, though silent, was animated, and possessed by impatience. As soon as dessert was finished she said :

"Supposing we went for a walk in the woods. It would be perfectly delightful under the trees."

"Are you mad?" murmured the Marquise, who looked utterly exhausted. "How can one go out in weather like this?"

"Very well," replied the young girl slyly, "we'll leave you here with the Baron to keep you company. Muscade and I will scramble up the hill and sit down and read on the grass."

She turned to Servigny, saying : "That's all right, isn't it?"

"At your service, Mam'selle," he replied.

She ran off to fetch her hat. The Marquise shrugged her shoulders and sighed : "Really, she's quite mad." Indolently she held out her beautiful white hand in a gesture of profound and seductive lassitude; the Baron pressed a lingering kiss upon it.

Yvette and Servigny departed. At first they followed the river, then they crossed the bridge and went on to the island, and sat down under the willows on the bank of the main stream, for it was still too early to go to La Grenouillère.

The young girl at once took a book from her pocket and, laughing, said :

"Muscade, you're going to read to me." And she held out the volume for him to take. He made a deprecatory gesture. "I, Mam'selle? But I can't read."

"Come, now, no excuses, no arguments," she replied severely. "You're a nice lover, you are. 'Everything for nothing'—that's your creed, isn't it?"

He took the book and opened it, and was surprised to find that it was a treatise on entomology, a history of ants by an

English author. He remained silent, thinking that she was making fun of him.

"Go on, read," she said.

"Is this a bet," he asked, "or just a joke?"

"Neither. I saw the book in a shop; they told me it was the best book about ants, and I thought it would be nice to hear about the lives of the little creatures and watch them running about in the grass at the same time. So read away."

She lay down face downwards at full length, her elbows resting on the ground and her head between her hands, her eyes fixed on the grass.

"Without doubt," he read, "'the anthropoid apes are of all animals those which approach most closely to man in their anatomical structure; but if we consider the habits of ants, their organisation into societies, their vast communities, the houses and roads which they construct, their custom of domesticating animals and even at times of having slaves, we shall be forced to admit that they have the right to claim a place near man on the ladder of intelligence.'"

He continued in a monotonous voice, stopping from time to time to ask: "Isn't that enough?"

She signed "no" with a shake of her head, and, having picked up a wandering ant on the point of a blade of grass she had plucked, she amused herself by making it run from one end of the stem to the other, turning it upside-down as soon as the insect reached either end. She listened in silence and with concentrated attention to all the surprising details of the life of these frail creatures, their subterranean establishments, the way in which they bring up, keep, and feed little grubs in order to drink the secret liquor they secrete, just as we keep cows in our byres, their custom of domesticating little blind insects which clean their dwellings, and of going to war in order to bring back slaves to serve the victors, which the slaves do with such solicitude that the latter even lose the habit of feeding themselves.

And little by little, as though a maternal tenderness had awakened in her head for this creature at once so tiny and so intelligent, Yvette let it climb about her finger, watching it with loving eyes, longing to kiss it. And as Servigny read how they live in a community, how they play together in a friendly rivalry of strength and skill, the young girl, in her enthusiasm, tried to kiss the insect, which escaped from her finger and began to run over her face. She shrieked as violently as though a deadly peril threatened her, and with wild gestures she slapped at her cheek to get rid of the creature. Servigny, roaring with laughter, caught it near her hair and, at the spot where he had caught it, pressed a long kiss, from which Yvette did not recoil.

She got up, declaring: "I like that better than a novel. Now let's go to La Grenouillère."

They reached a part of the island which was laid out like a park, shaded with huge trees. Couples wandered under the lofty foliage beside the Seine, over which the boats were gliding. There were girls with young men, working girls with their sweethearts, who were walking in shirt-sleeves, coats on their arms and tall-hats on the back of their heads, looking weary and dissipated; clerks with their families, the wives in their Sunday best, the children running round their parents like a brood of chickens. A continuous distant buzz of human voices, a dull, rumbling clamour, announced the nearness of the establishment beloved of boating parties. Suddenly it came into view, an enormous roofed barge moored to the bank, filled by a crowd of men and women who sat drinking at tables or stood up, shouting, singing, laughing, dancing, capering to the noise of a jingling piano, out of tune and as vibrant as a tin-can. Tall, red-haired girls, displaying before and behind them the swelling, provocative curves of breasts and hips, walked up and down with eager, inviting glances, all three-parts drunk, talking obscenities. Others were dancing wildly in front of young men who were half naked, dressed only in

rowing-shorts and zephyrs, and wearing coloured jockey-caps on their heads. There was a pervading odour of sweat and face powder, the combined exhalations of perfumeries and arm-pits. Those who were drinking at the tables were swallowing white and red and yellow and green liquids, screaming and yelling for no reason, yielding to a violent need to make a din, an animal instinct to fill ears and brain with noise. From time to time a swimmer dived from the roof, splashing those sitting near, who yelled at him like savages.

On the river a fleet of boats passed and repassed; long narrow skiffs went by, urged on by the powerful strokes of bare-armed oarsmen, whose muscles worked under the tanned skin. The women in the boats, dressed in blue or red flannel, holding open umbrellas, also blue or red, over their heads, made brilliant splashes of colour under the burning sun. They lolled on their seat in the stern and seemed to glide along the water, motionless or drowsy. Heavier boats moved slowly past, loaded with people. A light-hearted student, bent on making himself conspicuous, rowed with a windmill stroke, bumping into all the boats, whose occupants swore at him. He eventually disappeared crestfallen, after nearly drowning two swimmers, followed by the jeers of the crowd jammed together on the floating café.

Yvette, radiant, passed through the middle of this noisy, struggling crowd on Servigny's arm. She seemed quite happy to be jostled by all and sundry, and stared at the girls with calm and friendly eyes.

"Look at that one, Muscade, what lovely hair she's got! They *do* seem to be enjoying themselves."

The pianist, an oarsman dressed in red, whose hat was very like a colossal straw parasol, began a waltz. Yvette promptly seized her companion by the waist and carried him off with the fury she always put into her dancing. They went on so long and with such frenzy that the whole crowd watched them. Those who were sitting drinking stood upon their tables and

beat time with their feet, others smashed glasses. The pianist seemed to go mad; he banged at the ivory keys with galloping hands, gesticulating wildly with his whole body, swaying his head and its enormous covering with frantic movements.

Abruptly he stopped, slid down, and lay full length on the ground, buried under his hat, as though dead of exhaustion. There was a burst of laughter in the café, and every one applauded. Four friends rushed up as though there had been an accident, and picking up their comrade, bore him off by all four limbs, after placing on his stomach the roof under which he sheltered his head. Another jester followed, intoning the *De Profundis*, and a procession formed up behind the mock corpse. It went round all the paths in the island, gathering up drinkers, strollers, indeed every one it met.

Yvette ran along enraptured, laughing heartily and talking to every one, wild with the din and the bustle. Young men pushed against her and stared at her excitedly with eyes whose burning glances seemed to strip her naked. Servigny began to be afraid that the adventure might end unfortunately. The procession went on its way, getting faster and faster, for the four bearers had begun to race, followed by the yelling crowd. But suddenly they turned towards the bank, stopped dead at the edge, for an instant swung their comrade to and fro, and then, all letting go of him at once, they heaved him into the water. A great shout of merriment burst from every mouth, while the bewildered pianist splashed about, swearing, coughing, and spitting out the water; stuck fast in the mud, he struggled to climb up the bank. His hat, which was floating down the stream, was brought back by a boat.

Yvette danced with joy and clapped her hands, saying:

"Oh, Muscade, what fun, what fun!"

Servigny, now serious, watched her, a little embarrassed and a little dismayed to see her so much at ease in these vulgar surroundings. He felt a faint disgust born of the instinct that an

aristocrat rarely loses, even in moments of utter abandon, the instinct that protects him from unpardonable familiarities and contacts that would be too degrading. "No one will credit you with too much breeding, my child," he said to himself, astounded. He had an impulse to speak to her aloud as familiarly as he always did in his thoughts, with as little ceremony as he would have used on meeting any woman who was common property. He no longer saw her as any different from the red-haired creatures who brushed against them, bawling obscene words in their harsh voices. Coarse, brief, and expressive, these words were the current speech of the crowd; they seemed to flit overhead, born there in the mud like flies in the dunghill over which they hover. No one seemed shocked or surprised; Yvette did not seem to notice them at all.

"Muscade, I want to bathe," she said. "Let's go out into deep water."

"At your service, ma'am," he replied.

They went to the bathing-cabin to get costumes. She was ready first and waited for him on the bank, smiling at all who looked at her. Then they went off side by side in the warm water. She swam with a luxurious abandon, caressed by the stream, quivering with a sensual pleasure; at every stroke she raised herself as though she were ready to leap out of the river. He found difficulty in keeping up with her; he was out of breath and angry at his inferiority. But she slowed down and then turned quickly and floated, her arms crossed, her eyes staring towards the blue sky. He gazed at the soft, supple line of her body as she lay there on the surface of the river, at the rounded form and small, firm tips of the shapely breasts revealed by her thin, clinging garment, the curving sweetness of her belly, the half-submerged thighs, the bare calf gleaming through the water, and the small foot thrust out. He saw every line of her, as though she were deliberately displaying herself to tempt him, offering herself to him or trying to make a fool of him again. He began to desire her with a passionate

ardour, every nerve on edge. Abruptly she turned round and looked at him.

"What a nice head you have," she said with a laugh.

He was hurt, irritated by her teasing, filled with the savage fury of the derided lover. He yielded to a vague desire to punish her, to avenge himself; he wanted to hurt her.

"You'd like that sort of life, would you?" he said.

"What sort?" she asked, with her most innocent air.

"Come now, no more nonsense. You know perfectly well what I mean."

"No, honestly, I don't."

"We've had enough of this comedy. Will you or won't you?"

"I don't understand you in the least."

"You're not so stupid as all that. Besides, I told you last night."

"What? I've forgotten."

"That I love you."

"You!"

"Yes, I!"

"What a lie!"

"I swear it's true."

"Prove it, then."

"I ask for nothing better."

"Well, do, then."

"You didn't say that last night."

"You didn't propose anything."

"Oh, this is absurd!"

"Besides, I am not the one to be asked."

"That's very kind of you! Who is, then?"

"Mamma, of course."

He gave way to a fit of laughter.

"Your mother? No, really, that's too much!"

She had suddenly become very serious, and, looking into his eyes, said:

"Listen, Muscade, if you really love me enough to marry me, speak to mamma first, and I'll give you my answer afterwards."

At that he lost his temper altogether, thinking that she was still playing the fool with him.

"What do you take me for, Mam'selle? An idiot like the rest of your admirers?"

She continued to gaze at him with calm, clear eyes. After a moment's hesitation she said:

"I still don't understand."

"Now look here, Yvette," he said brusquely, with a touch of rudeness and ill nature in his voice. "Let's have done with this ridiculous comedy, which has already gone on too long. You keep on playing the innocent maiden, and, believe me, the part doesn't suit you at all. You know perfectly well that there can be no question of marriage between us—but only of love. I told you I loved you—it's quite true—I repeat, I do love you. Now don't pretend not to understand, and don't treat me as though I were a fool."

They were upright in the water, face to face, supporting themselves by little movements of the hands. For some seconds more she continued motionless, as though she could not make up her mind to understand his words, then suddenly she blushed to the roots of her hair. The blood rushed in a swift tide from her neck to her ears, which turned almost purple, and without a word she fled landwards, swimming with all her strength, with hurried, powerful strokes. He could not overtake her, and the pursuit left him breathless. He saw her leave the water, pick up her wrap, and enter her cabin, without turning her head.

He took a long time to dress, very puzzled what to do, planning what to say to her, and wondering whether to apologise or persevere.

When he was ready, she had gone, alone. He returned slowly, worried and anxious. The Marquise, on Saval's arm,

was strolling along the circular path round the lawn. At sight of Servigny she spoke with the careless air she had assumed on the previous evening :

"Didn't I tell you not to go out in such heat? Now Yvette has sunstroke ; she's gone to lie down. She was as scarlet as a poppy, poor child, and has a frightful headache. You must have been walking full in the sun, and up to some mischief or other, Heaven knows what. You have no more sense than she has."

The young girl did not come down to dinner. When asked if she wanted something brought up to her room, she replied through the closed door that she was not hungry—she had locked herself in and wished to be left alone. The two young men left by the ten o'clock train, promising to come again the following Thursday, and the Marquise sat down by the open window and, musing, listened to the far-off sound of dance-music jerked out at La Grenouillère, vibrating in the profoundly solemn silence of night.

Inured and hardened to love by love, as a man is to riding or rowing, she nevertheless had sudden moments of tenderness which attacked her like a disease. These passions seized roughly upon her, swept through her whole being, driving her mad, exhausting her, or depressing her according to their nature, lofty, violent, dramatic, or sentimental.

She was one of those women who were created to love and to be loved. From a very humble beginning she had climbed high through love, of which she had made a profession almost without being aware of it : acting by instinct, by inborn skill, she accepted money as she accepted kisses, naturally, without distinguishing between them, employing her amazing intuition in an unreasoning and utterly simple fashion, as animals, made cunning by the struggle for life, employ theirs. Many lovers had lain in her arms, and she had felt no tenderness for them, but also no disgust at their embraces. She endured all caresses with calm indifference, as a traveller eats anything, because he

must live. But from time to time her heart or her flesh caught fire, and she fell into a passion which lasted weeks or months, according to the physical and moral qualities of her lover. These were the delicious moments of her life. She loved with her whole soul, her whole body, with ecstatic abandon. She threw herself into love like a suicide into a river, and let herself be carried away, ready to die if necessary, intoxicated, maddened, infinitely happy. Each time she thought she had never before felt anything like it, and she would have been entirely amazed if she had been reminded of the many different men of whom she had dreamed passionately all night long, gazing at the stars.

Saval had fascinated her, captured her body and soul. She dreamed of him now, soothed by his image and her remembrance of him, in the calm exaltation of a joy fulfilled, of a happiness present and certain.

A noise behind her made her turn round. Yvette had just come in, still in the same dress she had worn all day, but pale now, and with the burning eyes that are the mark of great weariness. She leaned on the ledge of the open window opposite her mother.

"I've something to tell you," she said.

The Marquise, surprised, looked at her. Her love for her daughter was selfish; she was proud of her beauty, as one is proud of wealth; she was herself still too beautiful to be jealous, too careless to make the plans she was commonly supposed to entertain, yet too cunning to be unconscious of her daughter's value.

"Yes, child," she replied, "I'm listening; what is it?"

Yvette gave her a burning look, as though to read the depths of her soul, as though to detect every emotion which her words would rouse.

"This is it. Something extraordinary happened just now."

"What?"

"Monsieur de Servigny told me he loved me."

The Marquise waited, uneasy. But as Yvette said nothing more, she asked :

"How did he tell you? Explain!"

The young girl sat down by her mother's feet in a familiar coaxing attitude and, pressing her hand, said :

"He asked me to marry him."

Madame Obardi made a sudden gesture of amazement, and cried :

"Servigny? You must be mad!"

Yvette's eyes had never left her mother's face, watching sharply for her thoughts and her surprise.

"Why must I be mad?" she asked gravely. "Why should Monsieur de Servigny not marry me?"

"You must be wrong," stammered the Marquise, embarrassed; "it can't be true. You can't have heard properly—or you misunderstood him. Monsieur de Servigny is too rich to marry you, and too . . . too . . . Parisian to marry at all."

Yvette slowly rose to her feet.

"But if he loves me as he says he does?" she added.

Her mother replied somewhat impatiently :

"I thought you were old enough and knew enough of the world not to have such ideas in your head. Servigny is a man of the world and an egoist; he will only marry a woman of his own rank and wealth. If he asked you to marry him . . . it means he wants . . . he wants . . ."

The Marquise, unable to voice her suspicions, was silent for a moment, then added :

"Now leave me alone, and go to bed."

And the young girl, as though she now knew all she wanted, replied obediently :

"Yes, mother."

She kissed her mother's forehead and departed with a calm step. Just as she was going out of the door, the Marquise called her back :

"And your sunstroke?" she asked.

"I never had one. It was this affair which had upset me."

"We'll have another talk about it," added the Marquise. "But, above all, don't be alone with him again after this occurrence for some time. And you may be quite sure that he won't marry you, do you understand, and that he only wants to . . . to compromise you."

This was the best she could do by way of expressing her thoughts. And Yvette returned to her room.

Madame Obardi began to reflect.

Having lived for years in an amorous and opulent tranquillity, she had carefully guarded her mind from every thought that might preoccupy, trouble, or sadden her. She had always refused to ask herself what would become of Yvette; there was always time enough to think of that when difficulties arose. She knew, with her courtesan's instinct, that her daughter could not marry a rich and really well-born man save by an extremely improbable piece of good fortune, one of those surprises of love which set adventuresses upon thrones. She did not really contemplate this possibility, too much pre-occupied to form plans by which she herself would not be directly affected.

Yvette would doubtless follow in her mother's footsteps. She would become a light o' love; why not? But the Marquise had never had the courage to ask herself when, or how, this would come about.

And now here was her daughter suddenly, without any preparation, asking her one of those questions which cannot be answered, and forcing her to take up a definite position in an affair so difficult, so delicate, so dangerous in every sense, which so profoundly troubled her conscience, the conscience any mother must display when her daughter is involved in an affair such as this.

She had too much natural wit, a wit which might nod but was never quite asleep, to be deceived for one moment in Servigny's intentions, for she knew men, by personal experi-

ence, especially men of that tribe. And so, at the first words uttered by Yvette, she had cried out, almost involuntarily :

"Servigny marry you? You must be mad!"

What had led him to use the old, old trick—he, the shrewd rake, the jaded man about town? What would he do now? And the child, how was she to be more explicitly warned or even defended? She was capable of any folly. Who would imagine that a great girl like that could be so innocent, so ignorant, and so unwary?

And the Marquise, thoroughly perplexed and already exhausted by her mental efforts, was utterly at a loss, finding the situation truly difficult.

Weary of the whole business, she thought :

"Oh, well, I'll keep a close watch on them and act according to events. If necessary, I'll even talk to Servigny; he's sensitive, and can take a hint."

She did not ask herself what she should say to him, nor what he would reply, nor what sort of an agreement could be made between them, but, happy at being relieved of this anxiety without having had to take a decision, she began again to dream of her adored Saval. Her glance, wandering in the night, turned to the right towards the misty radiance that hovered over Paris; with both hands she threw kisses towards the great city, swift unnumbered kisses that flew into the darkness one after another; and very softly, as though she were still speaking to him, she murmured :

"I love you! I love you!"

III

Yvette also could not sleep. Like her mother, she sat at the open window, resting her elbows on the sill, and tears, her first bitter tears, filled her eyes.

Till now she had lived and grown up in the heedless and

serene self-confidence of happy youth. Why should she have analysed, wondered, reflected? Why should she not have been like all young girls of her age? Why should doubt, fear, painful suspicions have troubled her? Because she seemed to talk about every subject, because she had taken the tone, the manner, the bold speech of those around her, she had seemed to know all about everything. But she knew no more than a girl brought up in a convent; her risky phrases came from her memory, from the faculty women possess of imitation and assimilation, not from a mind already sophisticated and debauched.

She talked of love in the same way that an artist's or musician's son talks of painting and music at ten or twelve years of age. She knew, or rather suspected, the sort of mystery hidden behind this word—too many jests had been whispered in her presence for her innocence to remain completely unenlightened—but how was she to tell from this that every household was not like the one she lived in? Her mother's hand was kissed with apparent respect; all their friends were titled; all were rich, or appeared to be; all spoke familiarly of princes of the blood royal. Two king's sons had actually come several times, in the evening, to the Marquise's house. How was she to know?

And, besides, she was by nature innocent. She did not probe into things, she had not her mother's intuitive judgment of other people. She lived tranquilly, too full of the joy of life to worry about circumstances which might have roused suspicions in people of more quiet, more thoughtful, more secluded ways, who were less impulsive and less radiantly joyous. And now, in a single instant, by a few words whose brutality she had felt without understanding, Servigny had roused in her a sudden uneasiness, an uneasiness at first unreasoning, and now growing into a torturing fear.

She had gone home, had fled from him like a wounded animal; deeply wounded, indeed, by the words she repeated

to herself again and again, trying to penetrate their farthest meaning, trying to guess their whole implication: "You know perfectly well that there can be no question of marriage between us—but of love!"

What had he meant? And why this insult? There was something, then, some shameful secret, of which she was in ignorance? Doubtless she was the only one in ignorance of it. What was it? She was terrified, crushed, as at the discovery of a hidden infamy, the treachery of a friend, one of those calamities of the heart which strike at one's very reason.

She had thought, wondered, pored over it, wept, consumed with fears and suspicions. Then her young and buoyant nature calmed her, and she began to imagine an adventure, to build up an unusual and dramatic situation drawn from her remembrance of all the fanciful romances she had read. She recalled exciting changes of fortune, gloomy and heart-rending plots, and mingled them with her own story, to fling a romantic glory round the half-seen mystery which surrounded her.

She was no longer miserable, she was wholly wrapped up in her dreams. She lifted mysterious veils, imagined improbable complications, a thousand curious and terrible ideas, attractive through their very strangeness. Was she, by any chance, the natural daughter of a prince? Had her unfortunate mother been seduced and deserted, created a marquise by a king, King Victor Emmanuel perhaps, and had she even been forced to flee from the wrath of his family?

Or was she not more probably a child abandoned by her parents, very noble and famous parents, as the fruit of a guilty love, and found by the Marquise, who had adopted her and brought her up? A hundred other notions raced through her head; she accepted or rejected them at the dictates of her fancy. She grew profoundly sorry for herself, at once very happy and very sad; above all, she was delighted at becoming the heroine of a romance with emotions to reveal, a part to act, a dignity and nobility to be upheld. And she thought of the

part she would have to play in each plot she imagined. She saw it vaguely, as if she were a character in a novel by Scribe or George Sand. It would be compounded of equal parts of devotion, pride, self-sacrifice, magnanimity, tenderness, and fine words. Her volatile heart almost revelled in her new position.

She had continued till nightfall to ponder over her future course of action, wondering how to set to work to drag the truth from the Marquise.

And at the coming of night, so suitable to a tragic situation, she had thought of a trick, a quite simple yet subtle trick, for getting what she wanted; it was to tell her mother very abruptly that Servigny had asked her to marry him. At this news Madame Obardi, in her surprise, would surely let fall a word, an exclamation, that would illumine her daughter's mind.

So Yvette had promptly put her plan into execution. She expected a burst of astonishment, protests of affection, disclosures, accompanied by tears and every sign of emotion.

And lo and behold! her mother had not apparently been either surprised or heart-broken, merely annoyed; from the worried and peevish tone of her reply the young girl, in whose mind every latent power of feminine cunning, wit, and knowledge were suddenly aroused, realised that it was no good insisting, that the mystery was quite other and more painful than she had imagined, and that she must discover it for herself. So she had returned to her room with a sad heart, her spirit distressed, depressed now in the apprehension of a real misfortune, without knowing how or why she was suffering such an emotion. She rested her elbows on the window-sill and wept.

She cried for a long time, not dreaming now; she made no attempt at further discovery. Little by little she was overcome with weariness, and closed her eyes. She dozed, for a few minutes, in the unrefreshing slumber of a person too exhausted to undress and get into bed; her sleep was long and fitful,

roughly broken whenever her head slipped from between her hands.

She did not go to bed until the earliest gleam of daylight, when the chill of dawn drove her from the window.

During the next day and the next, she kept an air of melancholy and reserve. Her mind was at work ceaselessly and urgently within her; she was learning to watch, to guess, to reason. A gleam, still vague, seemed to throw a new light upon the men and events passing around her; distrust invaded her soul, distrust of every one that she had believed in, distrust of her mother. During those two days she conjectured every conceivable supposition. She envisaged every possibility, making the most extravagant resolutions, in the impulsiveness of her volatile and unrestrained nature. On the Wednesday she fixed on a plan, a whole scheme of conduct and an elaborate plan of espionage. On the Thursday morning she rose with the determination to be more cunning than the most experienced detective, to be armed against all the world.

She even decided to take as her motto the two words "Myself alone," and for more than an hour she wondered how they could with best effect be engraved round her monogram and stamped on her note-paper.

Saval and Servigny arrived at ten o'clock. The young girl held out her hand with reserve, but without embarrassment, and said in a familiar, though serious, tone:

"Good morning, Muscade. How are you?"

"Pretty well, thank you, Mam'selle. And you?"

He watched her narrowly. "What game is she playing now?" he said to himself.

The Marquise having taken Saval's arm, he took Yvette's, and they began to walk round the lawn, disappearing and reappearing behind the clumps of trees.

Yvette walked with a thoughtful air, her eyes on the gravel path, and seemed scarcely to hear her companion's remarks, to which she made no reply.

Suddenly she asked :

"Are you really my friend, Muscade ?"

"Of course, Mam'selle."

"But really, really and truly ?"

"Absolutely your friend, Mam'selle, body and soul."

"Enough not to tell a lie for once, just for once ?"

"Enough not even to tell one for twice, if necessary."

"Enough to tell me the whole truth, even if it's unpleasant ?"

"Yes, Mam'selle."

"Well, what do you really think, really, really think, of Prince Kravalow ?"

"Oh, Lord !"

"There you are, already getting ready to tell a fib."

"No, I'm searching for the words, the right words. Well, dash it, the Prince is a Russian—a real Russian, who speaks Russian, was born in Russia, and perhaps had a passport to get into France. There's nothing false about him except his name and his title."

She looked into his eyes.

"You mean he's a . . . a . . ."

He hesitated ; then, making up his mind, said :

"An adventurer, Mam'selle."

"Thank you. And the Chevalier Valréali is no better, is he ?"

"It's as you say."

"And Monsieur de Belvigne ?"

"Ah, he's rather different. He's a gentleman, provincial of course ; he's honourable . . . up to a point . . . but he's singed his wings through flying too near the candle."

"And you ?"

Without hesitation he replied :

"I ? Oh, I'm what's generally called a gay dog, a bachelor of good family who once had brains and frittered them away on making puns ; who had health, and ruined it by playing the fool ; moderate wealth, and wasted it doing nothing. All

I have left is a certain experience of life, a pretty complete freedom from prejudice, a vast contempt for men, women included, a profound sense of the uselessness of my actions, and a wide tolerance of scoundrels in general. I still have momentary flashes of honesty, as you see, and I'm even capable of affection, as you could see if you would. With these qualities and defects I place myself at your orders, Mam'selle, body and soul, for you to dispose of at your pleasure. There ! ”

She did not laugh ; she listened attentively, carefully scrutinising his words and meanings.

“ What do you think of the Comtesse de Lammy ? ” she continued.

“ You must allow me not to give you my opinions on women,” he said gaily.

“ Not on any ? ”

“ No, not on any.”

“ Then that means you must have a very low opinion of them, of all of them. Now think, aren't there any exceptions ? ”

He laughed with the insolent air he almost always wore, and the brutal audacity that was his strength, his armour against life.

“ Present company always excepted, of course,” he said.

She flushed slightly, but coolly asked :

“ Well, what do you think of me ? ”

“ You want to know ? Very well, then. I think you're a person of excellent sense, of considerable experience, or, if you prefer it, of great common sense ; that you know very well how to mask your battery, amuse yourself at others' expense, hide your purpose, pull the strings and wait, without impatience, for the result.”

“ Is that all ? ” she asked.

“ That's all,” he replied.

“ I'll make you alter that opinion Muscade,” she said very gravely. Then she went over to her mother, who was walking with bent head and tiny steps, with the languid gait one falls into when murmuring of things sweet and intimate. As she

walked she drew designs, letters perhaps, with the tip of her sunshade, and talked to Saval without looking at him, talked long and slowly, resting on his arm, held close against his side. Yvette looked sharply at her, and a suspicion, so vague that she could not put it into words, as if it were a physical sensation only half realised, flitted across her mind as the shadow of a wind-blown cloud flits across the earth.

The bell rang for lunch.

It was silent, almost gloomy.

There was storm in the air, as the saying goes. Vast motionless clouds lay in wait on the horizon, silent and heavy, but loaded with tempest.

When they had taken their coffee on the veranda, the Marquise asked :

"Well, darling, are you going for a walk to-day with your friend Servigny? This is really the weather to enjoy the coolness of the woods."

Yvette threw her a rapid glance, and swiftly looked away again.

"No, mother, I'm not going out to-day."

The Marquise seemed disappointed.

"Do go for a little walk, child," she persisted. "It's so good for you."

"No, mother," said Yvette sharply, "I'm going to stay in the house, and you know quite well why, because I told you the other night."

Madame Obardi had quite forgotten, consumed with her need to be alone with Saval. She blushed, fidgeted, and, distracted by her own desire, uncertain how to secure a free hour or two, stammered :

"Of course ; I never thought of it. You're quite right ; I don't know where my wits are wandering."

Yvette took up a piece of embroidery which she called the "public welfare," busying herself with it five or six times a year, on days of utter boredom, and seated herself on a low chair

beside her mother. The young men sat in deck-chairs and smoked their cigars.

The hours went by in idle conversation that flagged continually. The Marquise threw impatient glances at Saval, seeking for an excuse, any way of getting rid of her daughter. Realising at last that she would not succeed, and not knowing what plan to adopt, she said to Servigny :

"You know, my dear Duc, that you're both going to stay the night here. To-morrow we are going to lunch at the restaurant Fournaise, at Chatou."

He understood, smiled, and said with a bow :

"I am at your service, Marquise."

Slowly the day wore on, slowly and uncomfortably, under the menace of the storm. Gradually the hour of dinner approached. The lowering sky was heavy with dull, sluggish clouds. They could not feel the least movement in the air.

The evening meal was eaten in silence. A sense of embarrassment and restraint, a sort of vague fear, silenced the two men and the two women.

When the table had been cleared, they remained on the veranda, speaking only at long intervals. Night was falling, a stifling night. Suddenly the horizon was torn by a great jagged flame that lit with its dazzling and pallid glare the four faces sunk in the shadows. Followed a distant noise, dull and faint, like the noise made by a cart crossing a bridge ; the heat of the atmosphere increased, the air grew still more oppressive, the evening silence more profound.

Yvette rose.

"I'm going to bed," she said. "The storm makes me feel ill."

She bent her forehead for the Marquise to kiss, offered her hand to the two young men, and departed.

As her room was directly above the veranda, the leaves of a large chestnut-tree planted in front of the door were soon gleaming with a green light. Servigny fixed his eyes on this

pale gleam in the foliage, thinking now and then that he saw a shadow pass across it. But suddenly the light went out. Madame Obardi sighed deeply.

"My daughter is in bed," she said.

Servigny rose.

"I will follow her example, Marquise, if you will allow me."

He kissed her hand and disappeared in his turn.

She remained alone with Saval, in the darkness. At once she was in his arms, clasping him, embracing him. Then, though he tried to prevent it, she knelt down in front of him, murmuring: "I want to look at you in the lightning flashes."

But Yvette, her candle blown out, had come out on to her balcony, gliding bare-footed like a shadow, and was listening, tortured by a painful and confused suspicion. She could not see, being exactly over their heads on the roof of the veranda. She heard nothing but a murmur of voices, and her heart beat so violently that the thudding of it filled her ears. A window shut overhead. So Servigny had just gone up to bed. Her mother was alone with the other.

A second flash split the sky, and for a second the whole familiar landscape was revealed in a vivid and sinister glare. She saw the great river, the colour of molten lead, like a river in some fantastic dream-country. At the same instant a voice below her said: "I love you." She heard no more; a strange shudder passed over her, her spirit was drowned in a fearful sea of trouble.

Silence, pressing, infinite, a silence that seemed the eternal silence of the grave, brooded over the world. She could not breathe, her lungs choked by some unknown and horrible weight. Another flash kindled the heavens and for an instant lit up the horizon, another followed on its heels, then another and another.

The voice she had already heard repeated more loudly: "Oh! How I love you! How I love you!" And Yvette knew the voice well; it was her mother's.

A large drop of warm water fell upon her forehead, and a slight, almost imperceptible quiver ran through the leaves, the shiver of the coming rain.

Then a tumult came hurrying from far off, a confused tumult like the noise of the wind in trees; it was the heavy shower pouring in a torrent upon the earth, the river, and the trees. In a few moments the water was streaming all round her, covering her, splashing her, soaking her like a bath. She did not move, thinking only of what was happening on the veranda. She heard them rise and go up to their rooms. Doors slammed inside the house. And obeying an irresistible longing for certitude, a maddening, torturing desire, the young girl ran down the stairs, softly opened the outer door, ran across the lawn under the furious downpour of rain, and hid in a clump of bushes to watch the windows.

One alone, her mother's, showed a light. And suddenly two shadows appeared on the luminous square, two shadows side by side. Then they drew closer and made only one; another flash of lightning flung a swift and dazzling jet of light upon the house-front, and she saw them embracing, their arms about one another's necks.

At that she was stunned; without thinking, without knowing what she did, she cried out with all her strength, in a piercing voice: "Mother!" as one cries to warn another creature of deadly peril.

Her desperate cry was lost in the clatter of the rain, but the entwined pair started uneasily apart. One of the shadows disappeared, while the other tried to distinguish something in the darkness of the garden.

Fearing to be taken unawares and found by her mother, Yvette ran to the house, hurried upstairs, leaving a trail of water dripping from step to step, and locked herself in her room, determined to open to no one. Without taking off the soaking clothes which clung to her body, she fell upon her knees with clasped hands, imploring in her distress some superhuman pro-

tection, the mysterious help of heaven, that unknown aid we pray for in our hours of weeping and despair. Every instant the great flashes threw their livid light into the room, and she saw herself fitfully reflected in her wardrobe-mirror, with her wet hair streaming down her back, so strange a figure that she did not recognise herself.

She remained so for a long time, so long that the storm passed without her noticing its departure. The rain ceased to fall, light flowed into the sky, though it was still dark with clouds, and a warm, fragrant, delicious freshness, the freshness of wet leaves and grass, drifted in at the open window. Yvette rose from her knees, took off her cold sodden clothes, without thinking at all of what she did, and got into bed. She fixed her eyes on the growing daylight, then wept again, then tried to think.

Her mother! With a lover! The shame of it! But she had read so many books in which women, even mothers, abandoned themselves in like fashion, only to rise once more to honour in the last few pages, that she was not utterly dumbfounded to find herself involved in a drama like all the dramas in the stories she read. The violence of her first misery, her first cruel bewilderment, was already slightly lessened by her confused recollections of similar situations. Her thoughts had roamed among so many tragic adventures, gracefully woven into their stories by the authors of romances, that gradually her horrible discovery began to seem the natural continuation of a novelette begun the night before.

"I will save my mother," she said to herself.

Almost calmed by this heroic resolution, she felt herself strong, great, ready upon the instant for sacrifice and combat. She thought over the means she must employ. Only one seemed good to her, and accorded with her romantic nature. And she rehearsed, like an actress before the performance, the interview she would have with her mother.

The sun had risen and the servants were up and about. The

maid came with her chocolate. Yvette had the tray set down on the table, and said :

"Tell my mother that I'm not well, that I shall stay in bed till the gentlemen leave ; tell her I did not sleep last night and that I wish not to be disturbed, because I must try to sleep."

The astonished maid caught sight of the soaked dress, thrown like a rag on the carpet.

"Mademoiselle has been out, then ?" she said.

"Yes, I went for a walk in the rain to clear my head."

The servant picked up the petticoats, stockings, and muddy shoes, and went out carrying them gingerly on her arm with an expression of disgust ; they were dripping like the clothes of a drowned woman.

Yvette waited, knowing well that her mother would come.

The Marquise entered, having leapt out of bed at the first words of the maid, for she had endured a vague uneasiness ever since that cry of "Mother !" pierced the darkness.

"What's the matter ?" she said.

Yvette looked at her and faltered.

"I . . . I . . ."

Then, overcome by violent and sudden emotion, she began to sob.

The astonished Marquise asked again :

"What's the matter with you ?"

Then, forgetting all her schemes and carefully-prepared phrases, the young girl hid her face in her hands and sobbed :

"Oh, mother ! Oh, mother !"

Madame Obardi remained standing by the bed, too excited to understand fully, but guessing, with that subtle instinct wherein her strength lay, almost the whole truth.

Yvette, choked with sobs, could not speak, and her mother, exasperated at last and feeling the approach of a formidable scene, asked sharply :

"Come, what's the matter with you ? Tell me."

With difficulty Yvette stammered :

"Oh! last night . . . I saw . . . your window."

"Well, what then?" asked the Marquise, very pale.

Her daughter repeated, still sobbing:

"Oh, mother! Oh, mother!"

Madame Obardi, whose fear and embarrassment were changing to anger, shrugged her shoulders and turned to go.

"I really think you must be mad. When it's all over, let me know."

But suddenly the young girl parted her hands and disclosed her tear-stained face.

"No. . . . Listen. . . . I *must* speak to you. . . . Listen. Promise me . . . we'll both go away, far away, into the country, and we'll live like peasants and no one will know what's become of us. Will you, mother? Please, please, I beg you, mother, I implore you!"

The Marquise, taken aback, remained in the middle of the room. She had the hot blood of the people in her veins. Shame, maternal shame, mingled with a vague sensation of fear and the exasperation of a passionate woman whose love is menaced. She shivered, equally ready to implore forgiveness or to fly into a rage.

"I don't understand you," she said.

"I saw you, mother," continued Yvette, "last night. . . . You must never again . . . Oh, if you knew . . . we'll both go away. . . . I'll love you so much that you'll forget. . . ."

"Listen, my child," said Madame Obardi in a trembling voice, "there are some things you don't yet understand. Well, never forget . . . never forget . . . that I forbid you . . . ever to speak to me . . . of . . . of . . . of those matters."

But the young girl caught desperately at her rôle of saviour and went on:

"No, mother, I'm no longer a child, and I have the right to know. I know all sorts of disreputable people, adventurers, come to our house, and that that's why we are not respected; and I know more than that. Well, it mustn't be, I won't endure

it. We'll go away; you can sell your jewels; we'll work if necessary, and we'll live like honest women somewhere far away. And if I manage to get married, so much the better."

Her mother looked at her out of angry black eyes, and answered:

"You're mad. Be good enough to get up and come out to lunch with the rest of us."

"No, mother. There's someone here, you know whom, whom I won't see again. He must go out of this house, or I will. You must choose between us."

She was sitting up in bed, and raised her voice, speaking like a character on the stage; at last she had entered upon the drama so long dreamed of, and her grief was almost forgotten in absorption in her mission.

"You must be mad," repeated the astonished Marquise again, finding nothing else to say.

"No, mother," the young girl added, with dramatic verve, "that man leaves this house or else I go; I shall not weaken."

"And where will you go? . . . What will you do?"

"I don't know; it doesn't matter much . . . I want us to be honest women."

The repetition of that phrase "honest women" aroused in the Marquise the fury of a drab.

"Silence!" she shouted. "I won't be spoken to like that. I'm as good as any other woman, do you hear? I'm a harlot, it's true, and I'm proud of it; I'm worth a dozen of your honest women."

Yvette, overwhelmed, looked at her and stammered:

"Oh, mother!"

But the Marquise became frenzied with excitement.

"Yes, I am a harlot. What then? If I weren't a harlot, you'd be a kitchen-maid to-day, as I was once, and you'd work for thirty sous a day, and you'd wash the dishes, and your mistress would send you out on errands to the butcher's, d'you

hear, and kick you out if you were idle ; whereas here you are, idling all day long, just because I *am* a harlot. There ! When you're only a poor servant-girl with fifty francs of savings, you must get away from it somehow if you don't want to rot in the workhouse ; and there's only one way for women, only one way, d'you hear, when you're a servant ! We can't make fortunes on the stock exchange or at high finance. We've nothing but our bodies, nothing but our bodies."

She beat her breast like a penitent at confession, and advanced towards the bed, flushed and excited :

" So much the worse for a pretty girl ; she must live on her looks or grind along in poverty all her lifelong . . . all her life. . . . There's no alternative."

Then, returning hastily to her old idea : " And your honest women, do they go without ? It's they who are sluts, because they're not forced. They've money to live on and amuse themselves with ; they have their lovers out of pure wantonness. It's they who are sluts ! "

She stood beside Yvette's bed ; Yvette, utterly overcome, wanted to scream for help and run away ; she was crying noisily, like a beaten child.

The Marquise was silent, and looked at her daughter ; seeing the girl's utter despair, she was herself overcome by sorrow, remorse, tenderness, and pity ; and falling upon the bed with outstretched arms, she too began to sob, murmuring :

" My poor darling, my poor darling, if you only knew how you hurt me."

And for a long time they both wept.

Then the Marquise, whose grief never lasted very long, rose gently, and said very softly :

" Well, darling, that's how it is ; it can't be helped. It can't be altered now. Life must be taken as it comes."

But Yvette continued to cry ; the shock had been too severe and too unexpected for her to be able to reflect upon it calmly and recover herself.

"Come, get up, and come down to breakfast, so that nothing will be noticed," said her mother.

The young girl shook her head, unable to speak; at last she said very slowly, her voice choked with sobs:

"No, mother, you know what I said; I won't change my mind. I will not leave my room till they have gone. I won't see any of those people again, never, never. If they come back, I . . . I . . . you won't see me again."

The Marquise had dried her eyes and, worn out with her emotion, murmured:

"Come now, think it over, be sensible about it." Then, again, after a minute's silence: "Yes, you had better rest this morning. I'll come and see you in the afternoon."

She kissed her daughter on the forehead and went away to get dressed, quite calm again.

As soon as her mother had disappeared, Yvette ran to the door and bolted it, so as to be alone, quite alone; then she began to reflect.

About eleven o'clock the maid knocked at the door and asked:

"Madame la Marquise wishes to know if you want anything, Mademoiselle, and what will you have for lunch?"

"I'm not hungry," replied Yvette; "I only want to be left alone."

She stayed in bed as though she were really ill. About three o'clock there was another knock.

"Who's there?" she asked.

"It's I, darling," answered her mother's voice; "I've come to see how you are."

She hesitated. What should she do? She opened the door and got back into bed. The Marquise came close, speaking softly as though to an invalid.

"Well, are you feeling better? Won't you eat an egg?"

"No, thank you, nothing."

Madame Obardi had sat down beside the bed. Neither spoke for some time; then, at last, as her daughter remained

immobile, her hands resting inertly on the sheets, the Marquise added :

"Aren't you going to get up ? "

"Yes, presently," answered Yvette. "I've thought a great deal, mother," she continued slowly and seriously, "and this . . . this is my decision. The past is the past ; let us say no more about it. But the future will be different . . . or else . . . or else I know what I shall have to do. And now let us have done with this subject."

The Marquise, who had thought that the scene was all over, felt somewhat irritated. She had had more than enough. This great goose of a girl ought to have understood long ago. But she made no answer, only repeating :

"Are you going to get up ? "

"Yes, I'm ready now."

The mother acted as maid to her daughter, bringing her her stockings, her corset, and her petticoats. Then she kissed her.

"Shall we go for a walk before dinner ? "

"Yes, mamma."

And they walked along the bank of the river, talking almost entirely of the most trivial affairs.

IV

Next morning Yvette went off alone to sit in the place where Servigny had read over the history of the ants.

"I will not leave it," she said to herself, "until I have come to a decision."

The river ran at her feet, the swift water of the main stream ; it was full of eddies and great bubbles which swirled silently past her.

She had already envisaged every aspect of the situation and every means of escape from it. What was she to do if her mother failed to hold scrupulously to the condition she had laid

down, if she did not give up her life, her friends, everything, to take refuge with her in some distant region?

She might go alone . . . away. But whither? How? What could she live on? By working? At what? Whom should she ask for work? And the melancholy and humble life of the working girl, of the daughters of the common folk, seemed to be a little shameful, and unworthy of her. She thought of becoming a governess, like the young ladies in novels, and of being loved and married by the son of the house. But for that rôle she should have been of noble descent, so that when an irate parent reproached her for stealing his son's heart, she could have answered proudly:

"My name is Yvette Obardi."

She could not. And besides, it was a rather commonplace, threadbare method.

A convent was no better. Besides, she felt no call towards a religious life, having nothing but an intermittent and fleeting piety. No one—since she was the thing she was—could save her by marrying her, she could not take help from a man, there was no possible way out, no certain resource at all.

Besides, she wanted something violent, something really great, really brave, something that would act as an example: and she decided to die.

She came to this resolution quite suddenly, quite calmly, as though it were a question of a journey, without reflecting, without seeing what death means, without realising that it is an end without a new beginning, a departure without a return, an eternal farewell to earth, to life.

She was attracted immediately by this desperate decision, with all the impulsiveness of a young and ardent spirit. And she pondered over the means she should employ. They all appeared to be painful and dangerous to carry out, and to demand, too, a violence which was repulsive to her.

She soon gave up the idea of dagger or pistol, which might only wound, maim, or disfigure her, and which required a

steady and practised hand—rejected hanging as vulgar, a pauper's sort of suicide, ridiculous and ugly—and drowning because she could swim. Poison was all that remained, but which poison? Almost all are painful, and produce vomiting. She did not want to suffer, or to vomit. Then she thought of chloroform, having read in a newspaper of a young woman who suffocated herself by this means.

At once she felt something like pleasure in her resolve, a secret self-praise, a prick of vainglory. They should see the manner of woman she was!

She returned to Bougival and went to the chemist's, where she asked for a little chloroform for an aching tooth. The man, who knew her, gave her a very small phial of the drug. Then she walked over to Croissy, where she procured another little phial of poison. She got a third at Chaton, and a fourth at Rueil, and returned home late for lunch. As she was very hungry after her walk, she ate a hearty meal, with the sharp enjoyment that exercise brings.

Her mother, glad to see her excellent appetite, felt now quite confident, and said to her as they rose from the table:

"All our friends are coming to spend Sunday here. I've invited the prince, the chevalier, and Monsieur de Belvigne."

Yvette turned slightly pale, but made no answer. She left the house almost at once, went to the railway station, and took a ticket to Paris.

Throughout the afternoon she went from chemist to chemist, buying a few drops of chloroform from each.

She returned in the evening, her pockets full of little bottles. Next day she continued her campaign, and happening to go into a druggist's, she was able to buy half a pint all at once. She did not go out on Saturday—it was stuffy and overcast; she spent the whole of it on the veranda, lying in a long cane-chair. She thought about nothing, filled with a placid resolution.

The next day, wishing to look her best, she put on a blue

frock which suited her very well. And as she viewed herself in the mirror she thought suddenly: "To-morrow I shall be dead." A strange shiver ran through her body. "Dead! I shall not speak, I shall not think, no one will see me any more. And I shall never see all this again." She scrutinised her face carefully, as though she had never seen it before, examining, above all, the eyes, discovering a thousand aspects of herself, a secret character in her face that she did not know, astonished to see herself, as though she were face to face with a stranger, a new friend.

"It is I," she said to herself, "it is I, in that glass. How strange it is to see oneself. We should never recognise ourselves, if we had no mirrors. Every one else would know what we looked like, but we should have no idea of it."

She took the thick plaits of her hair and laid them across her breast, gazing at her own gestures, her poses and movements.

"How pretty I am!" she thought. "To-morrow I shall be dead, there, on my bed."

She looked at her bed, and imagined that she saw herself lying on it, white as the sheets.

Dead! In a week that face, those eyes, those cheeks, would be nothing but black rottenness, shut up in a box underground.

A frightful spasm of anguish constricted her heart.

The clear sunlight flooded the landscape, and the sweet morning air came in at the window.

She sat down and thought. Dead—it was as though the world was disappearing for her sake; but no, nothing in the world would change, not even her room. Yes, her room would stay just the same, with the same bed, the same chairs, the same dressing-table, but she would be gone for ever, and no one would be sorry, except perhaps her mother.

People would say: "How pretty she was, little Yvette!" and that was all. And when she looked at her hand resting on

the arm of her chair, she thought again of the rottenness, the black and evil-smelling corruption that her flesh would become. And again a long shudder of horror ran through her whole body, and she could not understand how she could disappear without the whole world coming to an end, so strong was her feeling that she herself was part of everything, of the country, of the air, of the sun, of life.

A burst of laughter came from the garden, a clamour of voices, shouts, the noisy merriment of a country-house party just beginning, and she recognised the sonorous voice of Monsieur de Belvigne, singing :

" Je suis sous ta fenêtre,
Ah ! daigne enfin paraître."

She rose without thinking and went to look out. Every one clapped. They were all there, all five of them, with two other gentlemen she did not know.

She drew back swiftly, torn by the thought that these men had come to enjoy themselves in her mother's house, in the house of a courtesan.

The bell rang for lunch.

" I will show them how to die," she told herself.

She walked downstairs with a firm step, with something of the resolution of a Christian martyr entering the arena where the lions awaited her.

She shook hands with them, smiling pleasantly but a little haughtily. Servigny asked her :

" Are you less grumpy to-day, Mam'selle ? "

" To-day," she replied in a strange, grave voice, " I am for the wildest pleasures. I'm in my Paris mood. Take care." Then, turning to Monsieur de Belvigne : " You shall be my pet to-day, my little Malvoisie. After lunch I'm taking you all to the fair at Marly."

Marly fair was indeed in full swing. The two new-comers

were presented to her, the Comte Tamine and the Marquis de Boiquetot.

During the meal she hardly spoke, bending every effort of will to her resolve to make merry all that afternoon, so that none might guess, so that there should be all the more surprise ; they would say : " Who would have thought it ? She seemed so gay, so happy ! One can never tell what is going on in their heads ! "

She forced herself not to think of the evening, the hour she had chosen, when they would all be on the veranda.

She drank as much wine as she could get down, to sharpen her courage, and took two small glasses of brandy ; when she left the table she was flushed and a little giddy ; she felt herself warmed in body and spirit, her courage high, ready for adventure.

" Off we go ! " she cried.

She took Monsieur de Belvigne's arm, and arranged the order of the rest.

" Come along, you shall be my regiment. Servigny, I appoint you sergeant ; you must march on the right, outside the ranks. You must make the Foreign Legion march in front, our two aliens, the prince and the chevalier, and behind them the two recruits who have joined the colours to-day. Quick march ! "

They went off, Servigny playing an imaginary bugle, and the two new arrivals pretending to play the drum. Monsieur de Belvigne, somewhat embarrassed, said to Yvette :

" Do be a little reasonable, Mademoiselle Yvette. You'll get yourself talked about."

" It's you I'm compromising, Raisiné," she replied. " As for myself, I don't care a rap. It will be all the same to-morrow. So much the worse for you ; you shouldn't go about with girls like me."

They went through Bougival, to the amazement of the people in the streets. Every one turned round and stared ; the local inhabitants came to their doors ; the travellers on the

little railway which runs from Rueil to Marly yelled at them ; the men standing on the platforms shouted :

" To the river ! . . . To the river ! . . . "

Yvette marched with a military step, holding Servigny by the arm, as if she were leading a prisoner. She was far from laughter ; she wore an air of pale gravity, a sort of sinister immobility. Servigny interrupted his bugle solo in order to shout orders. The prince and the chevalier were enjoying themselves hugely, judging it all vastly diverting and very witty. The two recruits played the drum steadily.

On their arrival at the fair ground they caused quite a sensation. The girls clapped, all the young folk giggled ; a fat man arm-in-arm with his wife said to her enviously :

" *They're enjoying life, they are.*"

Yvette caught sight of a merry-go-round, and made De Belvigne mount a wooden horse on her right, while the rest of the squad clambered on to horses behind them. When their turn was over she refused to get off, making her escort remain upon the back of her childish steed for five turns running. The delighted crowd flung witticisms at them. Monsieur de Belvigne was very white when he got off, and felt sick.

Then she began careering through the stalls. She made each of the men get weighed before the eyes of a large crowd. She made them buy absurd toys, which they had to carry in their arms. The prince and the chevalier very soon had more than enough of the jest ; Servigny and the two drummers alone kept up their spirits.

At last they reached the far end, and she looked at her followers with a curious expression, a glint of malice and perversity in her eyes. A strange fancy came into her head ; she made them all stand in a row on the right bank overlooking the river, and said :

" Let him who loves me most throw himself into the water."

No one jumped. A crowd had formed behind them ;

women in white aprons gaped at them, and two soldiers in red breeches laughed stupidly.

"Then not one of you is ready to throw himself into the water at my request?" she repeated.

"So much the worse, damn it," murmured Servigny, and leapt, upright, into the river.

His fall flung drops of water right up to Yvette's feet. A murmur of surprise and amusement ran through the crowd. Then the young girl bent down, picked up a little piece of wood, and threw it into the river, crying: "Fetch it."

The young man began to swim, and seizing the floating stick in his mouth, like a dog, he brought it to land, clambered up the bank, dropped on one knee, and offered it to her.

"Good dog," she said, taking it, and patting his head.

"How can they do it?" cried a stout lady, vastly indignant.

"Nice goings-on," said another.

"Damned if I'd take a ducking for any wench," said a man.

She took Belvigne's arm again, with the cutting remark:

"You're a noodle; you don't know what you've missed."

As they went home she threw resentful glances at the passers-by.

"How stupid they all look," she observed; then, raising her eyes to her companion's face, added: "And you too, for the matter of that."

Monsieur de Belvigne bowed. Turning round, she saw that the prince and the chevalier had disappeared. Servigny, wretched and soaked to the skin, was no longer playing the bugle, but walked with a melancholy air beside the two tired young men, who were not playing the drum now.

She began to laugh dryly.

"You seem to have had enough. That's what you call fun, isn't it? That's what you've come here for. I've given you your money's worth."

She walked on without another word, and suddenly De Belvigne saw that she was crying.

"What's the matter?" he asked in alarm.

"Leave me alone," she murmured. "It's nothing to do with you."

But he insisted foolishly: "Now, now Mademoiselle, what is the matter with you? Has anybody hurt you?"

"Be quiet," she said irritably.

Abruptly, unable to withstand the terrible sorrow flooding her heart, she broke into such a violent fit of sobbing that she could not walk any further. She covered her face with her hands, and gasped for breath, choking, strangled, stifled by the violence of her despair.

Belvigne stood helplessly beside her, repeating:

"I don't understand at all."

But Servigny rushed towards her. "Come along home, Mam'selle, or they'll see you crying in the street. Why do you do these silly things, if they make you so unhappy?"

He led her forward, holding her arm. But as soon as they reached the gate of the villa she ran across the garden and up to her room, and locked herself in.

She did not reappear until dinner-time; she was pale and very grave. All the rest were gay enough, however. Servigny had bought a suit of workman's clothes in the neighbourhood, corduroy trousers, a flowered shirt, a jersey, and a smock, and was talking like a peasant.

Yvette was in a fever for the ending of the meal, feeling her courage ebbing. As soon as coffee was over she went again to her room. She heard laughing voices under her window. The chevalier was telling jokes, foreign witticisms and puns, crude and not very savoury. She listened in despair. Servigny, slightly drunk, was imitating a tipsy workman, and was addressing the Marquise as "Mrs. Obardi." Suddenly he said to Saval: "Hullo, Mr. Obardi." Every one laughed.

Then Yvette made up her mind. First she took a sheet of her note-paper and wrote:

"BOUGIVAL, Sunday, 9 P.M.

"I die so that I may not become a kept woman.

"YVETTE."

Then a postscript :

"Good-bye, mother, dear. Forgive me."

She sealed up the envelope, and addressed it to Madame la Marquise Obardi.

Then she moved her arm-chair up to the window, set a little table within reach of her hand, and placed upon it the large bottle of chloroform, with a handful of cotton-wool beside it.

An immense rose-tree in full bloom, planted near the veranda and reaching right up to her window, filled the night with little gusts of faint, sweet fragrance ; for some moments she sat breathing in the perfumed air. The crescent moon swung in the dark sky, its left side gnawed away, and veiled now and again with small clouds.

"I'm going to die," thought Yvette. "I'm going to die !" Her heart, swollen with sobs, bursting with grief, choked her. She longed to cry for mercy, to be reprieved, to be loved.

Servigny's voice came up to her ; he was telling a shady story, constantly interrupted by bursts of laughter. The Marquise seemed more amused than any of them ; she repeated gaily : "No one can tell a story like that as well as he can."

Yvette took the bottle, uncorked it, and poured a little of the liquid on to the cotton-wool. It had a queer, pungent, sweet smell, and as she lifted the pad of cotton-wool to her lips, she swallowed the strong, irritating flavour of it, and it made her cough.

Then, closing her mouth, she began to breathe it in. She took long draughts of the deadly vapour, shutting her eyes, and compelling herself to deaden every impulse of her mind, so that she would no longer think nor realise what she was doing.

At first she felt as though her heart were swelling and growing,

as though her spirit, just now heavy and burdened with sorrow, were growing light, as light as if the weight oppressing it had been raised, lessened, removed.

A lively and pleasant sensation filled her whole body, penetrating to the tips of her fingers and toes, entering into her flesh, a hazy drunkenness, a happy delirium.

She saw that the cotton-wool was dry, and was surprised that she was not yet dead. Her senses were sharpened, intensified and more alert. She heard every word uttered on the veranda. Prince Kravalow was relating how he had killed an Austrian general in a duel.

Far away, in the heart of the country, she heard the noises of the night; the intermittent barking of a dog, the short croak of bull-frogs, the faint shiver of the leaves.

She took up the bottle, soaked the little piece of cotton-wool, and began again to breathe it in. For some moments she felt nothing; then the languid, delightful, secure contentment that she had felt at first took hold of her once more.

Twice she poured out more chloroform, greedy now of the physical and mental sensation, the drowsy languor in which her senses were drowning. She felt as though she no longer had bones or flesh or arms or legs. All had been gently taken from her, and she had felt nothing. The chloroform had drained away her body, leaving nothing but her brain, wider, freer, more lively, more alert than she had ever felt it before.

She remembered a thousand things she had forgotten, little details of her childhood, trifles which gave her pleasure. Her mind, suddenly endowed with an agility hitherto unknown to it, leapt from one strange idea to another, ran through a thousand adventures, wandered at random in the past, and rambled through hopes of the future. This rapid, careless process of thought filled her with a sensual delight; dreaming so, she enjoyed a divine happiness.

She still heard the voices, but could no longer distinguish the words, which seemed to her to take on another sense. She

sank down and down, wandering in a strange and shifting fairyland.

She was on a large boat which glided beside a very pleasant country filled with flowers. She saw people on the banks, and these people were talking very loudly, and then she found herself on land again, without wondering how she got there, and Servigny, dressed like a prince, came to take her to a bullfight. The streets were full of people talking, and she listened to their conversations, which did not in the least surprise her, but were as though she had always known them; for through her dreamy intoxication she still heard her mother's friends laughing and chatting on the veranda.

Then all grew dim.

Then she awoke, deliciously sleepy, and had some difficulty in recalling herself to consciousness.

So she was not dead yet.

But she felt so rested, and in such comfort and in such peace of mind, that she was in no hurry to finish the affair. She would have liked this glorious languor to last for ever.

She breathed slowly, and looked at the moon facing her above the trees. Something in her soul was changed. Her thoughts were no longer those of a short while ago. The chloroform, soothing her body and mind, had assuaged her grief, and put to sleep her will to die.

Why not live? Why should she not be loved? Why should she not live happily? Everything now seemed possible, easy, sure. Everything in life was sweet, was good and charming. But because she wished to go on dreaming for ever, she poured more of this dream-water on to the cotton-wool, and again began to breathe it in, occasionally removing the poison from her nostrils, so that she should not take too much, so that she should not die.

She looked at the moon, and saw a face in it, a woman's face. She began once more to roam about the country, adrift in the hazy visions of an opium dream. The face hung in the

centre of the sky ; then it began to sing ; in a well-known voice it sang the *Alleluia d'Amour*. It was the Marquise, who had just gone indoors to play the piano.

Yvette had wings now. She was flying through the night, a beautiful, clear night, over woods and rivers. She flew with vast delight, opening and beating her wings, wafted by the wind as by a caressing touch. She whirled through the air, which kissed her skin, and glided along so fast, so fast, that she had no time to see anything below her, and she found herself sitting beside a pond, with a line in her hand—she was fishing.

Something tugged at the line ; she pulled it in and brought up the magnificent pearl necklace she had once desired. She was not in the least astonished at the catch, and looked at Servigny, who had appeared beside her, though she did not know how, and was fishing too ; he was just landing a wooden roundabout horse.

Then once again she felt that she was waking, and heard them calling to her from below.

Her mother had said : " Blow out the candle."

Then Servigny's voice, clear and humorous : " Mam'selle Yvette, blow out your candle."

They all took up the cry in chorus.

" Mam'selle Yvette, blow out your candle."

Again she poured chloroform on to the cotton-wool, but as she did not want to die, she kept it at some distance from her face, so that she could breathe the fresh air while filling her room with the asphyxiating odour of the narcotic, for she knew that someone would come upstairs. So she arranged herself in a charming attitude of abandonment, a mimicking of the abandon of death, and waited.

" I'm a little uneasy," said the Marquise. " The foolish child has gone to sleep leaving the candle alight on the table. I'll send Clémence up to blow it out and to shut her balcony window, which she has left wide open."

In a few moments the maid knocked at the door and called :
" Mademoiselle, Mademoiselle ! "

After an interval of silence she began again : " Mademoiselle, Madame le Marquise says please will you blow out your candle and shut the window. "

Again she waited, then knocked more loudly and called :
" Mademoiselle, Mademoiselle ! "

As Yvette did not answer, the servant departed and told the Marquise :

" Mademoiselle has certainly gone to sleep ; her door is bolted and I can't wake her. "

" But surely she won't go on sleeping like that ? " murmured Madame Obardi.

On Servigny's advice they all assembled under the young girl's window and shouted in chorus :

" Hip, hip, hurrah—Mam'selle Yvette ! "

The cry rang out in the still night, piercing the clear moonlit air, and died away in the sleeping country-side ; they heard it fade away like the noise of a train that has gone by.

As Yvette did not reply, the Marquise said :

" I hope nothing's the matter with her ; I'm beginning to be alarmed. "

Then Servigny snatched the red roses and the still unopened buds from the big rose-tree that grew up the wall, and began to hurl them through the window into her room. At the first which struck her, Yvette started and nearly cried out. Some fell on her dress, some in her hair, others flew over her head and landed on the bed, covering it with a rain of flowers.

Once more the Marquise cried in a choking voice :

" Come, Yvette, answer ! "

" Really, it's not normal, " declared Servigny. " I'll climb up by the balcony. "

But the chevalier was indignant.

" Pardon me, pardon me, but that's too much of a favour,

I protest ; it's too good a way—and too good a time—for making a rendezvous ! ”

And all the others, thinking that the young girl was playing a trick on them, cried out :

“ We protest. It's a put-up affair. He shan't go up, he shan't go up.”

But the Marquise repeated in her agitation :

“ Someone must go and see.”

“ She favours the duke ; we are betrayed,” declared the prince, with a dramatic gesture.

“ Let's toss for the honour,” suggested the chevalier, and took a gold hundred-franc piece from his pocket.

He began with the prince. “ Tails,” he called. It was heads. The prince in his turn threw the coin, saying to Saval :

“ Call, please.”

“ Heads,” called Saval.

It was tails.

The prince proceeded to put the same question to all the others. All lost. Servigny, who alone remained facing him, drawled insolently :

“ Damn it, he's cheating ! ”

The Russian placed his hand on his heart and offered the gold coin to his rival, saying :

“ Spin it yourself, my dear duke.”

Servigny took it and tossed it, calling : “ Heads ! ”

It was tails. He bowed, and pointed to the pillar of the balcony.

“ Up you go, prince,” he said.

But the prince was looking about him with a troubled air.

“ What are you looking for ? ” asked the chevalier.

“ I . . . I should like a . . . a ladder.”

There was a general roar of laughter, and Saval came forward, saying : “ We'll help you.”

He lifted the man in his Herculean arms, with the advice : “ Hold on to the balcony.”

The prince promptly caught hold of it and, Saval letting go, he remained suspended, waving his legs. Servigny caught hold of the wildly-struggling limbs that were groping for a foothold, and tugged at them with all his strength; the hands loosed their grip and the prince fell like a log on to the stomach of Monsieur de Belvigne, who was hurrying forward to help support him.

"Whose turn now?" asked Servigny, but no one offered.

"Come on, Belvigne, a little courage."

"No, thank you, my boy. I'd sooner keep my bones whole."

"Well, you, then chevalier? You should be used to scaling fortresses."

"I leave it to you, my dear duke."

"Well . . . well . . . I don't know that I'm so keen on it as all that." And Servigny walked round the pillar with a scrutinising eye. Then he leapt, caught hold of the balcony, hauled himself up like a gymnast on the horizontal bar, and clambered over the rail.

All the spectators applauded, with uplifted faces. But he reappeared directly, crying: "Come at once! Quickly! Yvette's unconscious!"

The Marquise screamed loudly and dashed up the stairs.

The young girl, her eyes closed, lay like one dead. Her mother rushed wildly into the room and threw herself upon her.

"What is it? Tell me, what is it?" she asked.

Servigny picked up the bottle of chloroform which had fallen on the floor. "She's suffocated herself," he said. He set his ear to her heart, then added: "But she's not dead; we'll soon bring her round. Have you any ammonia here?"

"Any what . . . any what . . . sir?" said the distracted maid.

"Any sal volatile?"

"Yes, sir."

"Fetch it at once, and leave the door open, to make a draught."

The Marquise had fallen upon her knees and was sobbing. "Yvette! Yvette! My child, my little girl, my child, listen, answer me, Yvette! My child! Oh! my God, my God, what is the matter with her?"

The frightened men wandered aimlessly about the room, bringing water, towels, glasses, and vinegar.

Someone said: "She ought to be undressed."

The Marquise, who was almost out of her wits, tried to undress her daughter, but she no longer knew what she was doing. Her trembling hands fumbled uselessly at the clothing, and she moaned: "I . . . I . . . I can't, I can't."

The maid had returned with a medicine bottle; Servigny uncorked it and poured out half of its contents on to a handkerchief. He thrust it under Yvette's nose, and she choked.

"Good; she's breathing," he said. "It's nothing."

He bathed her temples, her cheeks, and her neck with the strong-smelling liquid. Then he signed to the maid to unlace the young girl, and when nothing but a petticoat was left over her chemise, he took her in his arms and carried her to the bed; he was shaken, his senses maddened by the fragrance of her half-naked body, by the touch of her flesh, and the softness of the half-seen breasts on which he pressed his lips.

When she was in bed he rose to his feet, very pale.

"She's coming to," he said; "it's nothing," for he had heard that her breathing was continuous and regular. But seeing the men's eyes fixed upon Yvette stretched across the bed, a spasm of jealous fury seized him. He went up to them, saying:

"Gentlemen, there are too many of us in this room. Be good enough to leave Monsieur Saval and myself alone with the Marquise."

His voice was sharp and authoritative. The other men left at once.

Madame Obardi had seized her lover in her arms and, with her face raised to his, was crying:

"Save her! . . . Oh, save her!"

But Servigny, who had turned round, saw a letter on the table. With a swift movement he picked it up and read the address. He guessed the whole affair at once and thought: "Perhaps the Marquise had better not know about this." And tearing open the envelope, he read at a glance the two lines which it contained:

"I die so that I may not become a kept woman.

"YVETTE."

"Good-bye, mother, dear. Forgive me."

"Deuce take it," he said to himself. "This needs thinking over"; and he hid the letter in his pocket. He returned to the bedside, and at once the thought came to him that the young girl had regained consciousness, but dared not show it out of shame, humiliation, and a dread of being questioned.

The Marquise had fallen on her knees and was weeping, her head resting on the foot of the bed. Suddenly she exclaimed:

"A doctor! We must have a doctor!"

But Servigny, who had been whispering to Saval, said to her:

"No, it's all right now. Just go out for a minute and I promise you that she'll be ready to kiss you when you come back."

The baron took Madame Obardi's arm and led her away. Servigny sat down beside the bed and took Yvette's hand.

"Listen to me, Mam'selle," he said.

She did not answer. She felt so happy, so comfortable, so cosy and warm that she would have liked never to move or speak again, but to live on in this state. A sense of infinite well-being possessed her, like no sensation she had ever known. The warm night air drifted into the room in a gentle, caressing breeze, and from time to time its faint breath blew sweetly across her face. It was a caress, the wind's kiss, the soft refreshing breath of a fan made of all the leaves in the wood,

all the shadows of the night, all the mists of the river, and all the flowers, for the roses strewn upon the floor and the bed, and the rose-tree that clung to the balcony, mingled their languid fragrance with the healthy tang of the night breeze.

She drank in the good air, her eyes closed, her senses still half adrift in the intoxication of the drug; she no longer felt a wish to die, but a strong, imperious desire to live, to be happy, no matter how, to be loved, yes, loved.

"Mam'selle Yvette, listen to me," repeated Servigny.

She decided to open her eyes. Seeing her thus revived, he went on:

"Come now, what's all this foolishness?"

"I was so unhappy, Muscade," she murmured.

He gave her hand a benevolent squeeze.

"Well, this has been a deuce of a lot of use to you, now, hasn't it? Now promise me not to try again."

She did not answer, but made a little movement of her head, and emphasised it with a smile that he felt rather than saw.

He took from his pocket the letter he had found on the table.

"Am I to show this to your mother?" he asked.

"No," she signed with a movement of her head.

He did not know what more to say, for there seemed no way out of the situation.

"My dear little girl," he murmured, "we must all accept our share of things, however sad. I understand your grief, and I promise. . . ."

"You're so kind. . . ." she stammered.

They were silent. He looked at her. There was tenderness and surrender in her glance, and suddenly she raised her arms, as if she wished to draw him to her. He bent over her, feeling that she was calling him, and their lips met.

For a long time they stayed thus with closed eyes. But he, realising that he was on the point of losing control, raised his head and stood up. She was smiling at him now with real

tenderness, and gripping his shoulders with both hands, she tried to hold him back.

"I'm going to fetch your mother," he said.

"One more second," she murmured. "I'm so happy."

Then, after a brief interval of silence, she said very softly, so softly that he hardly heard her :

"You will love me very much, won't you?"

He knelt down by the bedside and kissed her wrist, which she held out to him.

"I adore you."

But there were footsteps at the door. He sprang up and cried in his ordinary voice, with its faint note of irony :

"You can come in. It's all over now."

The Marquise flung herself upon her daughter with open arms, and embraced her frantically, covering her face with tears. Servigny, his heart full of joy and his body on fire with love, stepped out on to the balcony to breathe deeply of the cool night air, humming :



"Souvent femme varie ;
Bien fol est qui s'y fie."

OUR FRIENDS THE ENGLISH

A SMALL LEATHER-BOUND NOTEBOOK LAY ON THE UPHOLSTERED seat of the railway carriage. I took it up and opened it. It was a traveller's diary, dropped by its owner.

Here are the last three pages of it copied out.

February 1st. Mentone, capital of the Consumptives, noted for its pulmonary tubercles. Quite different from the potato tubercle, which lives and grows in the earth for the purpose of nourishing and fattening men, this variety lives and grows in man for the purpose of nourishing and fattening the earth.

I got this scientific definition from a friendly doctor here, a very learned man.

Am looking for an hotel. Am directed to the Grrrrand Hotel of Russia, England, Germany, and the Netherlands. Pay homage to the landlord's cosmopolitan intellect and book a room in this caravanserai, which looks empty, it is so big.

Walk round the town, which is pretty and admirably situated at the foot of an imposing mountain peak (see guide-book). Meet various people who look ill, being taken for a walk by others who look bored. Have observed several people wearing comforters (note this, all naturalists who may be becoming anxious at the disappearance of these garments!).

Six p.m. Return for dinner. The tables are laid in an enormous room which could shelter three hundred guests; as a matter of fact, it holds just twenty-two. They come in one after another. The first is a tall, thin, clean-shaven Englishman. He is wearing a frock-coat with a long skirt, fitting closely at the waist. His thin arms are enveloped in its sleeves

like an umbrella sheathed in its cover. This garment reminds me at the same time of an ecclesiastical cassock and of the civilian uniforms worn by ex-army captains and army pensioners. Down the front elevation runs a row of buttons clad in black serge like their master, and sewn very close to one another; they look like an army of wood-lice. The buttonholes stand in a row opposite and have the air of making unseemly advances to the modest little buttons.

The waistcoat fastens on the same system. The owner of the garment does not look precisely a sporty boy.

He bows to me; I return the compliment.

Next item—three ladies, all English, a mother and two daughters. Each wears a helping of whipped white of egg on the top of her head; rather remarkable. The daughters are old, like the mother. The mother is old, like the daughters. All three are thin, flat-chested, tall, stiff, and tired-looking; their front teeth are worn outside, to intimidate plates and men.

Other residents arrive, all English. Only one is fat and red-faced, with white whiskers. Every woman (there are fourteen) has a helping of white of egg on her head. I observe that this crowning delicacy is made of white lace (or is it tulle? I don't know). It appears to be unsweetened. All the ladies look as though they were pickled in vinegar, although there are several young girls, not bad-looking, but with no figures and with no apparent promise of them. I am reminded of Bouilhet's lines:

“Qu'importe ton sein maigre, ô mon objet aimé !
On est plus près du cœur quand la poitrine est plate ;
Et je vois comme un merle en sa cage enfermé,
L'amour entre les os, rêvant sur une patte.”

Two young men, younger than the first, are likewise imprisoned in sacerdotal frock-coats. They are lay priests, with wives and children; they are called parsons. They look more serious, less unbending, less kindly than our own priests.

I would not take a hogshead of them for a pint of ours. But that's a matter of taste.

As soon as all the residents are present, the head parson begins to speak, and recites, in English, a sort of long *benedicite*; the whole table listens to it with that pickled look on their faces.

My dinner being thus dedicated, despite me, to the God of Israel and Albion, all start their soup.

Solemn silence reigns in the huge room—a silence which is surely not normal. I suppose the chaste sheep are annoyed at the invasion of a goat.

The women especially retain a stiff, starched look, as though afraid of dropping their head-dress of whipped cream into the soup.

The head parson, however, addresses a few words to his neighbour, the under parson. As I have the misfortune to understand English, I observe with amazement that they are continuing a conversation, interrupted before dinner, on the texts of the prophets. Every one listens attentively.

I am fed, always against my will, upon unbelievable quotations.

“I will provide water for him that thirsteth,” said Isaiah.

I did not know it. I knew none of the truths uttered by Jeremiah, Malachi, Ezekiel, Elijah, and Gagachias. These simple truths crawled down my ears and buzzed in my head like flies.

“Let him that is hungry ask for food!”

“The air belongeth to the birds, as the sea belongeth to the fish.”

“The fig-tree produceth figs, and the date-palm dates.”

“He who will not hear, to him knowledge is denied.”

How much greater and more profound is our great Henry Monnier, who through the lips of one man, the immortal *Prud'homme*, has uttered more thrilling truths than have been compiled by all the goodly fellowship of the prophets.

Confronted by the sea, he exclaims: "How beautiful is the ocean, but what a lot of good land spoilt!"

He formulates the everlasting policy of the world: "This sword is the light of my life. I can use it to defend the Power that gave it to me, and, if need be, to attack It also."

Had I had the honour to be introduced to the English people surrounding me, I would certainly have edified them with quotations from our French prophet.

Dinner over, we went into the lounge.

I sat alone, in a corner. The British nation appeared to be hatching a plot on the other side of the room.

Suddenly a lady went to the piano.

"Ah," thought I, "a little mew-sic. Good."

She opened the instrument and sat down; the entire colony ranked itself round her like an army, the women in front, the men in the rear rank.

Were they going to sing an opera?

The head parson, now turned choirmaster, raised his hand, then lowered it; a frightful din rose up from every throat. They were singing a hymn.

The women squalled, the men barked, the windows shook. The hotel dog howled in the yard. Another answered him from a room.

I went off in a furious temper. I went for a walk round the town. No theatre. No casino. No place of amusement. I had to go back to the hotel.

The English were still singing.

I went to bed. They went on singing. Till midnight they sang the praises of the Lord in the harshest, most hateful, most out-of-tune voices I ever heard. Maddened by the horrible spirit of imitation which drives a whole nation to such orgies, I buried my head beneath the sheets and sang:

I pity the English Lord
To whom such hymns are outpoured.
If the Lord has a better ear
Than His faithful people here,
If He likes wit and grace
And a pretty face,
Appreciates music and art,
Talent and liveliness,
I pity Him, I confess,
From the bottom of my heart.

When I finally dropped off to sleep, I had fearful nightmares. I saw prophets riding upon parsons, eating white of egg off the heads of corpses.

Horrible ! Horrible !

February 2nd. As soon as I was up, I asked the landlord if these barbarian invaders of his hotel made a daily practice of this frightful diversion.

"Oh, no, sir," he answered with a smile. "Yesterday was Sunday, and Sunday is a holy day to them, you know."

I answered :

Nothing is sacred when a parson's near,
The traveller's rest, his dinner or his ear.
But if this caterwauling starts again,
I shall incontinently take the train.

Somewhat surprised, the landlord promised to look into the matter.

During the day I made a delightful excursion in the hills. At night, the same *benedicite*. Then the drawing-room. What will they do ? Nothing, for an hour.

Suddenly the same lady who accompanied the hymns the day before, goes to the piano and opens it. I shiver with fright.

She plays . . . a waltz.

The girls begin to dance.

The head parson beats time on his knee from force of habit. The Englishmen one after another invite the ladies; the white of egg whirls round and round and round: will it turn into sauce?

This is much better. After the waltz comes a quadrille, then a polka.

Not having been introduced, I remain demurely in a corner.

February 3rd. Another charming walk to the old castle, a picturesque ruin in the hills, on every peak of which remain the remnants of ancient buildings. Nothing could be more beautiful than the ruined castles among the chaos of rocks dominated by Alpine snow-peaks (see guide-book). Wonderful country.

During dinner I introduce myself, after the French fashion, to the lady next to me. She does not answer—English politeness.

In the evening, another English ball.

February 4th. Excursion to Monaco (see guide-books).

In the evening, English ball. I am present, in the rôle of plague-spot.

February 5th. Excursion to San Remo (see guide-books).

In the evening, English ball. Still in quarantine.

February 6th. Excursion to Nice (see guide-books).

In the evening, English ball. Bed.

February 7th. Excursion to Cannes (see guide-books).

In the evening, English ball. Have tea in my corner.

February 8th. Sunday; my revenge. Am waiting for them.

They have resumed their pickled Sunday faces, and are preparing their throats for hymns.

So before dinner I slip into the drawing-room, pocket the key of the piano, and say to the porter : " If the parsons want the key, tell them I have it, and ask them to see me."

During dinner various doubtful points in the Scriptures are discussed, texts elucidated, genealogies of biblical personages explained.

Then they go to the drawing-room. The piano is approached. Sensation.—Discussion ; they seem thunderstruck. The white of egg nearly flies off. The head parson goes out, then returns. More discussion. Angry eyes are turned on me ; here are the three parsons, bearing down on me in line. They are ambassadorial, really rather impressive. They bow. I get up. The eldest speaks :

" Mosieu, on me avé dit que vô avé pris la clef de la piano. Les dames vôdraient le avoir, pour chanté le cantique."

I answer : " Sir, I can perfectly well understand the request these ladies make, but I cannot concede to it. You are a religious man, sir ; so am I, and my principles, stricter, no doubt, than yours, have determined me to oppose this profanation of the divine in which you are accustomed to indulge.

" I cannot, gentlemen, permit you to employ in the service of God an instrument used on weekdays for girls to dance to. We, sir, do not give public balls in our churches, nor do we play quadrilles upon the organ. The use you make of this piano offends and disgusts me. You may take back my answer to the ladies."

The three parsons retired abashed. The ladies appeared bewildered. They sing their hymns without the piano.

February 9th. Noon. The landlord has just given me notice ; I am being expelled at the general request of the English people.

I meet the three parsons, who seem to be supervising my departure. I go straight up to them and bow.

"Gentlemen," I say, "you seem to have a deep knowledge of the Scriptures. I myself have more than a little scholarship. I even know a little Hebrew. Well, I should like to submit to you a case which profoundly troubles my Catholic conscience.

"You consider incest an abominable crime, do you not? Very well, the Bible gives us an instance of it which is very disturbing. Lot, fleeing from Sodom, was seduced, as you know, by his two daughters, and yielded to their desires, being deprived of his wife, who had been turned into a pillar of salt. Of this appalling and doubly incestuous connection were born Ammon and Moab, from whom sprang two great peoples, the Ammonites and the Moabites. Well, Ruth, the reaper who disturbed the sleep of Boaz in order to make him a father, was a Moabite.

"Do you not know Victor Hugo's lines?—

'. . . Ruth, une moabite,
S'était couchée aux pieds de Booz, le sein nu,
Espérant on ne sait quel rayon inconnu,
Quand viendrait du réveil la lumière subite.'

"The 'hidden ray' produced Obed, who was David's ancestor.

"Now then, was not Our Lord Jesus Christ descended from David?"

The three parsons looked at one another in consternation, and did not answer.

"You will say," I went on, "that I speak of the genealogy of Joseph, the lawful but superfluous husband of Mary, mother of Christ. Joseph, as we all know, had nothing to do with his son's birth. So it was Joseph who was descended from a case of incest, and not the Divine Man. Granted. But I will add two further observations. The first is that Joseph and Mary, being cousins, must have had the same ancestry; the second, that it is a disgrace that we should have to read ten pages of genealogical tree for nothing.

"We ruin our eyes learning that A begat B, who begat C, who begat D, who begat E, who begat F, and when we are almost driven off our heads by this interminable rigmarole, we come to the last one, who begat nothing. That, gentlemen, may well be called excess of mystification."

The three parsons, as one man, abruptly turned their backs on me, and fled.

Two p.m. I catch the train for Nice.

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There the diary ended. Although these remarks reveal in their author execrable taste, a cheap wit and much vulgarity, yet I think they might put certain travellers on their guard against the peril of the Englishman abroad.

I should add that there are undoubtedly charming Englishmen; I have often met them. But they are rarely our fellow-guests at hotels.

ROGER'S METHOD

I WAS WALKING WITH ROGER ONE DAY WHEN A STREET-HAWKER bawled in our ears :

"New method of getting rid of mothers-in-law ! Buy, oh buy !"

I stopped, and said to my companion :

"Now that reminds me of a question I've long wanted to ask you. What is this 'Roger's method' your wife talks about so often ? She jokes about it in such a gay, knowing way that I take it to be some love-potion of which you hold the secret. Whenever she's told of some young man who is exhausted and has lost his nervous strength, she turns to you and says with a smile : 'Ah, you ought to show him Roger's method.' And the funniest thing of all is that you always blush."

"Well, there's a reason for it," answered Roger. "If my wife really knew what she was talking about, she'd stop it mighty quick. I'll tell you the story in strict confidence. You know I married a widow with whom I was very much in love. Now my wife has always been very free of speech, and before she became my wife we often had rather spicy little talks. After all, that's possible with widows ; they have the taste of it in their mouths, you see. She has a perfectly honest liking for good smoking-room stories. The sins of the tongue do very little harm ; she's bold, and I'm bashful ; and before our wedding she liked to embarrass me with jokes and questions which were not easy for me to answer. Perhaps it was her forwardness which made me fall in love with her. And, talking of love, I was absolutely devoted to her from head to toe, and she knew it too, the little baggage."

"We decided on a quiet wedding and no honeymoon."

After the religious ceremony the witnesses were to lunch with us, and then we were to go for a drive, returning to my house in the Rue du Helder for dinner. Well, the witnesses left, and off we went in the carriage; I told the coachman to take us to the Bois de Boulogne. It was the end of June, and gorgeous weather.

"As soon as were alone, she began to laugh.

"My dear Roger," she said, "now's the time to show yourself gallant. See what you can do."

"This invitation absolutely paralysed me. I kissed her hand; I told her I loved her. I even had the pluck to kiss the nape of her neck twice, but the passers-by embarrassed me. And she kept on saying with a funny, provoking little air: 'What next? . . . What next? . . .'

"This 'what next?' drained all my strength away. After all, in a carriage, in the Park, in broad daylight, one could hardly . . . well, you know what I mean.

"She was amused by my obvious embarrassment. From time to time she remarked: 'I'm very much afraid I've drawn a blank. You make me very uneasy.'

"I too began to be uneasy—about myself. As soon as I'm scared, I become perfectly useless.

"At dinner she was charming. To pluck up my courage, I'd sent away my servant, who embarrassed me. Oh, we were perfectly well-behaved, but you know how foolish lovers are. We drank from the same glass, we ate off the same plate, with the same fork. We amused ourselves by beginning one biscuit from both ends, so that our lips met in the middle.

"I should like a little champagne," she said.

"I had forgotten the bottle on the sideboard. I took it, untwisted the wires, and pressed the cork to make it fly off. It wouldn't go. Gabrielle smiled and murmured: 'An evil omen.'

"I pushed the swollen end of the cork with my thumb,

I twisted it to the right, I twisted it to the left, but in vain, and suddenly I broke it right at the lip of the bottle.

" 'Poor Roger,' sighed Gabrielle.

"I took a corkscrew and screwed it into the piece left in the neck. I couldn't pull it out; I had to call Prosper back. My wife was now shrieking with laughter and saying: 'Well, well; I see I can depend on you.' She was a little tipsy.

"By the time we came to the coffee, more than a little.

"A widow does not need to be put to bed with the maternal solicitude accorded to young girls, and Gabrielle went calmly to her room, saying: 'Smoke your cigar for a quarter of an hour.'

"When I rejoined her, I had lost confidence in myself, I admit. I felt unnerved, worried, ill at ease.

"I took my lawful place. She said nothing. She looked at me with a smile upon her lips, obviously desiring to chaff me. Irony, at such a moment, was the last straw. I must confess that it made me helpless—hand and foot.

"When Gabrielle observed my . . . embarrassment, she did nothing to reassure me. On the contrary, she asked me with an air of detachment: 'Are you always as lively as this?'

"I could not help answering: 'Shut up; you're unbearable.'

"She went on laughing, but in an unrestrained, improper, exasperating way.

"True, I cut a sorry figure, and must have looked a proper fool.

"From time to time, between new fits of merriment, she would say, choking with laughter: 'Come on—be brave—buck up, you poor boy.'

"Then she continued to laugh so immoderately that she positively screamed.

"Finally I was so exhausted, so furious with myself and her, that I realised I should smack her unless I went away.

"I jumped out of bed and dressed myself quickly in a fiendish temper, without a word to her.

"She became grave at once and, seeing that I was angry, asked: 'What are you doing? Where are you going?'

"I did not answer, and went down into the street. I wanted to kill someone, to have my revenge, to do some quite insane thing. I strode straight ahead at a great rate, and suddenly the idea came to me to go off with a woman. Who knows?—it would be a trial, an experience, practice perhaps. At all events it would be revenge. And if I were ever deceived by my wife, I should at least have deceived her first.

"I did not hesitate. I knew of a house not far from my own house; I ran there and went in like a man who throws himself into deep water to see if he can still swim.

"Well, I *could* swim; I swam very well. I stayed there a long time, enjoying my secret and subtle revenge. Then I found myself in the street once more, at the cool hour before dawn. I now felt calm and sure of myself, contented, tranquil and still ready, I thought, for deeds of valour.

"I went slowly home, and quietly opened the door of my room.

"Gabrielle was reading, her elbow propped up on the pillow. She raised her head and asked in a frightened voice: 'Ah, there you are; where have you been?'

"I made no answer. I undressed with an air of assurance. I returned like a victorious lord to the place whence I had abjectly fled.

"She was amazed, and was convinced that I had made use of some mysterious secret.

"And now on every occasion she speaks of 'Roger's method' as though she were referring to some infallible scientific device.

"Well, well, it's ten years ago now, and I'm afraid the same attempt would not have much chance of success to-day, for me at any rate.

"But if any friend of yours is nervous about his wedding-night, tell him of my stratagem, and tell him, too, that from twenty to thirty-five there's no better way of loosening the tags, as the squire of Brantôme would have said."

THE CHRISTENING

IN FRONT OF THE FARM-GATE THE MEN WERE WAITING IN THEIR Sunday clothes. The May sun shed its brilliant light on the flowering apple-trees which roofed the whole farmyard with blossom in great, round, fragrant bunches of pink and white. Petals fell round them in a ceaseless shower, fluttering and eddying into the tall grass, where the dandelions glittered like flames and the poppies were splashed in drops of blood.

A sow slumbered on the side of the manure-heap, and a band of little pigs with twisted, cord-like tails ran round her huge belly and swollen dugs.

Far away, through the trees behind the farmhouse, the church-bell suddenly rang out. Its iron voice sent up a faint and distant cry to the radiant heavens. Swallows darted arrow-like across the blue spaces bounded by the still shafts of tall beeches. A faint smell of stables mingled with the soft sweet fragrance of the apple-trees.

One of the men standing by the gate turned towards the house and cried :

"Come quick, Méline ; t'bell's ringin'."

He was about thirty years of age, a tall young peasant, as yet not bowed or deformed by long labour in the fields. His old father, gnarled like the trunk of an oak, with scarred wrists and crooked legs, announced : "Women, they bean't never ready first."

The two other sons laughed, and one, turning to the eldest brother, who had shouted first, said : "Go fetch 'em, Polyte. They'll not be here before noon."

The young man entered the house.

A flock of ducks near at hand began to quack and flap their wings, and waddled off down to the pond.

Then at the open door appeared a stout woman carrying a two-months-old child. The white strings of her high bonnet hung down her back, streaming over a shawl as violently scarlet as a house on fire. The child, wrapped in white garments, rested against the nurse's protruding stomach.

Next came the mother, a tall, strong girl of barely eighteen, fresh and smiling, holding her husband's arm. The two grandmothers followed, wrinkled like old apples, weariness apparent in their bowed backs, long since bent by rough and patient toil. One was a widow; she took the arm of the grandfather waiting at the gate, and they left at the head of the procession, just behind the child and the midwife. The rest of the family followed, the younger ones carrying paper bags full of sweets.

The little bell rang ceaselessly, calling with all its strength to the tiny mite it awaited. Children clambered on the dikes; heads appeared at gateways; milkmaids set down their pails and stood between them to watch the christening go by.

And the nurse moved on triumphantly with her living burden, stepping between the puddles on the road, which ran between the tree-crowned banks. And the old people advanced with ceremonious steps, walking a little crookedly, because of their age and infirmity. And the young folk were eager to dance, and looked at the girls who came to see them go by; and the father and mother walked with graver mien, following the child who would take their place and carry on their name in the country, the honoured name of Dentu.

They emerged on the plain and struck across the fields, avoiding the long, roundabout road. Now the church came into view, with its pointed steeple. Just below the slate roof was an aperture, within which something swung swiftly backwards and forwards, passing and repassing behind the narrow window. It was the bell, still ringing, calling the new-born child to come for the first time to the house of God.

A dōg had begun to follow the procession ; they threw sweets to it, and it frisked round their feet.

The church-door was open. By the altar stood the priest, a tall fellow, slim and strong, with red hair. He too was a Dentu, the child's uncle, another brother of the father. And he duly bestowed the name of Prosper-César upon his nephew, who began to cry when he tasted the symbolic salt.

When the ceremony was over, the family waited on the steps while the priest took off his surplice ; then they started off once more. They went fast now, for there was the prospect of dinner before them. A crowd of urchins followed, and whenever a handful of sweets was thrown to them they struggled furiously ; they fought hand to hand and pulled one another's hair ; even the dog dashed into the fight for the sweets, more stubborn than the children who tugged at his tail and ears and paws.

The nurse was tired ; she turned to the priest walking beside her, and said : " How'd it be, sir, if you was to carry your nevvie for a stretch ? Ah'm that cramped in the belly, ah'd like a bit of a rest, like."

The priest took the child in his arms, the white clothes making a broad white stripe over the black cassock. He was embarrassed by the little burden, not knowing how to carry it or set it down. Every one laughed, and one of the grandmothers shouted ; " Aren't ye ever sorry, passon, that ye'll never have one of your own ? "

The priest made no answer. He went forward with long strides, gazing intently at the blue-eyed baby, longing to kiss the rounded cheeks. He could no longer restrain the impulse ; raising the child to his face, he gave it a long kiss.

The father shouted : " Hey there, passon, if ye'd like one, ye've only to say so."

They began to jest, after the fashion of peasants.

As soon as they were seated at table, the rough peasant merriment broke out like a tempest. The two other sons

were also to marry soon ; their sweethearts were present, invited just for the meal ; the guests perpetually alluded to the future generations foreshadowed by these unions.

Their words were coarse and pungent ; the blushing girls giggled, the men guffawed. They shouted and beat upon the table with their fists. The father and grandfather were not behindhand with scandalous suggestions. The mother smiled ; the old women took their share in the fun and thrust in drastic remarks.

The priest, inured to these rustic orgies, sat quietly beside the nurse, tickling his nephew's little mouth. He seemed surprised at the child's appearance, as though he had never noticed it. He contemplated it with deliberate intentness, with dreamy gravity, and a tenderness arose in his heart, a strange, unknown tenderness, sharp and a little melancholy, for the frail little creature that was his brother's son.

He heard nothing, saw nothing, but stared at the child. He wanted to take him once more upon his knees, for still in his breast and in his heart he retained the soft pressure of the infant's body, as when he carried him back from the church.

He was touched by that scrap of humanity as by an ineffable mystery of which he had never before thought, a mystery sacred and august, a new spirit made flesh, the great mystery of new-born life, of wakening love, of the undying race of humanity going on for ever and ever.

The nurse was eating ; her eyes shone in her red face. She was worried by the child, who prevented her from getting comfortably near the table.

"Give him to me," said the priest ; "I'm not hungry." And he took the child. Then everything around him faded and disappeared ; his eyes were fixed on the chubby pink face. Little by little the warmth of the tiny body penetrated through the shawls and the cassock to his legs, like a caress, so light, so good, so pure, so sweet, that his eyes filled with tears.

The noise of the revellers became terrific. The child, disturbed by the uproar, began to cry.

A voice sang out: "Hey there, parson, feed your baby."

And a burst of laughter shook the room. But the mother had risen; she took her son and carried him into the next room. She came back a few minutes later announcing that he was fast asleep in his cradle.

The meal went on. From time to time men and women went out into the yard, then returned and sat down again. The meat, the vegetables, the cider, and the wine coursed down their throats, swelled their bellies, excited their spirits.

Night was falling when the coffee came in.

Long before then the priest had vanished, his absence arousing no surprise.

At last the young mother rose to see if the child were still asleep. It was dark now. She entered the room on tiptoe, and advanced with arms outstretched, so as not to knock against the furniture. But a strange noise made her stop, and she hurried out again in a fright, sure that she had heard someone move. Pale and trembling, she regained the dining-room and told her story. The men rose noisily, drunk and angry, and the father, a lamp in his hand, rushed out.

The priest was on his knees beside the cradle, sobbing. His forehead rested on the pillow, beside the child's head.

THE CONFESSION

THE ENTIRE POPULATION OF VÉZIER-S-LE-RÉTHEL HAD FOLLOWED Monsieur Badon-Leremincé to his grave; in every memory lingered still the last words of the prefect's funeral oration: "An honourable man has gone from us."

Honourable he had been in every visible action throughout his life, in his speech, in the example he set, in his appearance, in his bearing, in his gait, in the cut of his beard and the shape of his hats. He had never spoken a word which did not contain a precept, never given alms without adding a piece of advice, never held out his hand without the air of bestowing a benediction.

He left two children, a son and a daughter; his son was on the town council, and his daughter, who had married a solicitor, Monsieur Poirel de la Voulte, moved in the best circles in Véziers.

They were inconsolable at their father's death, for they loved him sincerely.

As soon as the ceremony was over, they returned to the house of death. All three, son, daughter, and son-in-law, shut themselves up in a room and opened the will, which was to be unsealed by them alone, and only after the coffin had been deposited in its resting-place. This request was conveyed to them by a brief note on the envelope.

Monsieur Poirel de la Voulte, as a lawyer accustomed to such proceedings, opened the envelope. After adjusting his spectacles, he read it out to them in a dry voice fitted for the recital of legal details.

"My children, my dear children, I could not rest quietly in my last sleep did I not make this confession to you from

beyond the grave. It is the confession of a crime which I have regretted with a bitterness that has poisoned my life. Yes, I am guilty of a crime, a frightful, appalling crime.

"I was twenty-six years old at the time, and had just been called to the bar in Paris. There I lived like any other young provincial stranded in the city without acquaintances, friends, or relatives.

"I took a mistress. How many people there are whom the word 'mistress' revolts! Yet there are people who cannot live alone. I am one of them. Solitude fills me with a frightful agony, solitude at night, at home by the fireside. At such times I feel as though I were alone on earth, terribly alone, but surrounded with vague dangers, strange, fearful perils. The thin wall which separates me from my neighbour, the neighbour I do not know, keeps me as far from him as from the stars I see from my window. I am overcome with a sort of fever, a fever of impatience and fear, and the silent walls terrify me. It is so deep and so sad, the silence of a room in which one lives alone. It is not only a silence round about the body, but a silence about the soul, and when a piece of furniture creaks, a shiver runs through the heart, for in this sorrowful place any sound comes as a surprise.

"Often, unnerved and distracted by this terrifying silence, I have begun to speak, to babble words without sense or reason, just for the sake of making a noise. At these times my voice sounded so strange that I was afraid of it too. Is there anything more terrifying than talking to oneself in an empty house? One's voice seems to be another's, an unknown voice, speaking without cause, speaking to nobody, in the hollow air, with no human ear to hear. For one knows, even before they escape into the solitude of the room, the words which are about to come from one's mouth, and when they resound mournfully in the silence, they sound no more than an echo, the strange echo of words murmured in an undertone by the brain.

"I took a mistress, a young girl just like all the young girls who work in Paris at a profession too poorly paid to keep them. She was a sweet, good little thing; her parents lived at Poissy. Occasionally she would go to spend a few days with them.

"For a year I lived uneventfully with her, fully intending to leave her as soon as I should find a girl attractive enough for me to marry. I proposed to leave her a small income, for among people of our class it is commonly acknowledged that a woman's love must be paid for, in cash when she is poor, in presents when she is rich.

"But one day she informed me that she was going to have a child. I was aghast; in a flash I foresaw the ruin of my whole life. I saw the chain I was doomed to drag with me till the day of my death, everywhere I went, in my future family life, in my old age, for ever: the chain of the woman bound to my life by the child, the chain of this child which must be brought up, watched, protected, while all the time the secret must be kept from it and from the world. I was utterly cast down by the news, and a vague desire—a desire I never expressed, but felt in my heart ready to leap out, like men hidden behind doors waiting the word to spring—a criminal desire lurked in the recesses of my mind. Supposing there were an accident. So many of these little creatures die before they are born.

"Oh! I had no wish to see my mistress die. Poor girl, I loved her well. But perhaps I desired the death of the other, before I saw it.

"The child was born. In my little bachelor apartment was a family, a sham family with a child; an unnatural thing. The child was like all babies. I did not love it. Fathers, you know, do not love till later. They have not the natural passionate tenderness that belongs to mothers; their affections have to wake little by little, their souls come upon love little by little, through those bonds which each day draws closer between human beings who share each other's lives.

"Another year went by ; now I shunned my cramped little house, littered with linen and swaddling-clothes and socks the size of gloves, a thousand objects of all kinds lying on a table, on the arms of a chair, everywhere. Above all I kept away so as not to hear him cry, for he cried on every occasion, when his clothes were changed, when he was washed, when he was put to bed, indeed always.

"I had made some friendships, and in a drawing-room one day I met your mother. I fell in love with her, and the desire to marry her woke in my heart. I wooed her and asked her hand in marriage ; it was granted me.

"And there I was, caught in a trap. I must marry this young girl I adored, already having a child of my own—or I must tell the truth and renounce her, my happiness, my future, everything ; for her parents, who were very strict, would never have consented to the marriage if they had known all.

"I spent a terrible month of agonising moral torment, a month during which a thousand terrible thoughts haunted me. And ever growing within me I felt a hatred for my son, for that little scrap of living, weeping flesh who barred my way, cut my life in two, and condemned me to a cheerless existence without any one of the vague hopes which are the charm of youth.

"Then my mistress' mother fell ill, and I was left alone with the child.

"It was December, and frightfully cold. What a night ! My mistress had just gone ; I had dined alone in the little parlour, and softly entered the room where the baby slept.

"I sat before the fire in an arm-chair. A dry, icy wind blew outside and rattled the window-panes, and through the window I could see the stars glitter with that keen light they have on frosty nights.

"Then the obsession which for the last month had haunted me entered into my head anew. The moment I sat still it descended upon me and gnawed my brain. It gnawed me as

fixed ideas do, as cancer must gnaw the flesh. I felt it there in my head, in my heart, in my whole body ; it devoured me like a wild beast. I tried to hunt it away, to drive it off, to open my mind to other thoughts, to new hopes, as one opens a window in the morning to let out the tainted air of the night ; but not for a single instant could I chase it from my brain. I do not know how to describe this torture. It nibbled at my soul, and I felt every movement of its teeth with horrible pain, a veritable anguish of body and soul.

“ My life was over ! How was I to escape from this dilemma ? How draw back and how confess ? ”

“ And I loved your mother madly ; that made the insurmountable obstacle still more frightful.

“ A terrible rage grew in me, tightening my throat, a rage which was akin to madness . . . madness ! Yes, I was mad, that night !

“ The child was asleep. I rose and watched it sleeping. It was he, that abortion, that mite, that nothing, who condemned me to hopeless misery.

“ He slept, with his mouth open, under a heap of blankets, in a cradle near the bed in which *I* could not sleep.

“ How did I do what I did ? Do I know ? What force led me on, what evil power possessed me ? Oh, the temptation came to me without my realising how it made its presence known. I remember only that my heart beat furiously, so violently that I heard it like the strokes of a hammer from behind a wall. That is all I remember—my heart beating. In my head was a strange confusion, a tumult, a routing of all reason, all common sense. I was in one of those hours of terror and hallucination wherein man has no longer knowledge of his actions nor control of his will.

“ Softly I raised the coverings which hid my child's body ; I threw them on the foot of the cradle, and saw him stark-naked. He did not wake. Then I went to the window, softly, so softly ; and I opened it.

"A blast of icy air rushed in like a murderer, so bitterly cold that I fell back before it; and the two candles flickered. And I remained standing by the window, not daring to turn round, as if not to see what was happening behind me, and always feeling, gliding over my temples, my cheeks, my hands, the deathly air which flowed into the room in a steady stream. It went on a long time.

"I did not think, I considered nothing. Suddenly a little cough sent a dreadful shiver through me from head to foot, a shiver I can feel at this moment, in the roots of my hair. With a wild movement I slammed the window down and, turning round, ran to the cradle.

"He was still asleep, with open mouth, stark-naked. I touched his legs; they were frozen, and I pulled up the coverings.

"My heart suddenly softened, snapped, was filled with pity, tenderness, and love for the poor innocent wretch I had wanted to kill. I pressed a long kiss on his thin hair, then sat down again by the fireside.

"I thought with stupor, with horror, of what I had done; I wondered whence came these tempests of the soul wherein man loses all awareness of things, all control over himself, and acts under a kind of mad intoxication, not knowing what he does, nor where he goes, like a ship in a hurricane.

"The child coughed once more, and my heart was rent in two. If he were to die! Oh, my God! my God! What would become of me?

"I got up to go and look at him; and, a candle in my hand, I bent over him. Seeing him breathing quietly, I was reassured; he coughed a third time, and I was seized with a terrible shudder, and started so violently back—as a man might when distracted at the sight of some frightful happening—that I let the candle fall.

"When I straightened myself after picking it up I observed that my temples were drenched with the sweat of agony, a

sweat hot and icy at once, as though some part of the frightful moral suffering and unspeakable torture, which does actually burn like fire and freeze like ice, were oozing out through the skin and bone of my skull.

"Till daybreak I remained beside the cradle, calming my fears when he remained quiet for a long stretch, and enduring terrible agonies when a feeble cough issued from his mouth.

"He awoke with red eyes and a sore throat, obviously ill.

"When the charwoman came, I sent her out at once for a doctor. He came at the end of an hour, and after examining the child, he said :

" ' Has he not been cold ? ' "

" ' No, I don't think so, ' I stammered, trembling like a very old man.

" Then I asked :

" ' What is it ? Is it serious ? ' "

" ' I cannot tell yet, ' he answered. ' I will come back again this evening. ' "

" He did come back again that evening. My son had lain almost all day in a deep slumber, coughing from time to time.

" During the night inflammation of the lungs set in.

" It lasted ten days. I cannot tell you what I suffered during those interminable hours which separate dawn from dusk and dusk from dawn.

" He died. . . .

" And since then, since that moment, I have not passed an hour, no, not one hour, without that poignant, fearful memory, that memory which gnaws and twists and rends my spirit, stirring within me like a ravenous beast imprisoned in the bottom of my soul.

" Oh, if I had only been able to go mad ! "

Monsieur Poirol de la Voulte pushed up his spectacles : it was a gesture customary with him when he had finished reading

a deed ; and the three looked at one another in silence, pale and motionless.

After a moment the lawyer said : " This must be destroyed."

The other two nodded their assent. He lit a candle, carefully separated the pages containing the dangerous confession from those containing the monetary dispositions, then placed them in the flame of the candle and threw them into the grate.

They watched the white pages burn up. Soon they were only a small black heap. Several letters could still be distinguished, standing out white against the blackened paper, so the daughter crushed the thin shrivelled layer of ash with nervous movements of her toe, and stamped it down among the cold cinders.

For some time longer the three of them stayed watching as though they were afraid that the burnt secret would escape up the chimney.

THE MOTHER OF MONSTERS

I WAS REMINDED OF THIS HORRIBLE STORY AND THIS HORRIBLE woman on the sea-front the other day, as I stood watching—at a watering-place much frequented by the wealthy—a lady well known in Paris, a young, elegant, and charming girl, universally loved and respected.

My story is now many years old, but such things are not forgotten.

I had been invited by a friend to stay with him in a small country town. In order to do the honours of the district, he took me about all over the place; made me see the most celebrated views, the manor-houses and castles, the local industries, the ruins; he showed me the monuments, the churches, the old carved doors, the trees of specially large size or uncommon shape, the oak of St. Andrew and the Roqueboise yew.

When, with exclamations of gratified enthusiasm, I had inspected all the curiosities in the district, my friend confessed, with every sign of acute distress, that there was nothing more to visit. I breathed again. I should be able, at last, to enjoy a little rest under the shade of the trees. But suddenly he exclaimed:

“Why, no, there *is* one more. There’s the Mother of Monsters.”

“And who,” I asked, “is the Mother of Monsters?”

He answered: “She is a horrible woman, a perfect demon, a creature who every year deliberately produces deformed, hideous, frightful children, monsters, in a word, and sells them to peep-show men.

“The men who follow this ghastly trade come from time to time to discover whether she has brought forth any fresh

abortion, and if they like the look of the object, they pay the mother and take it away with them.

"She has dropped eleven of these creatures. She is rich.

"You think I'm joking, making it up, exaggerating. No, my friend, I'm only telling you the truth, the literal truth.

"Come and see this woman. I'll tell you afterwards how she became a monster-factory."

He took me off to the outskirts of the town.

She lived in a nice little house by the side of the road. It was pretty and well kept. The garden was full of flowers, and smelt delicious. Anyone would have taken it for the home of a retired lawyer.

A servant showed us into a little parlour, and the wretched creature appeared.

She was about forty, tall, hard-featured, but well built, vigorous, and wealthy, the true type of robust peasantry, half animal and half woman.

She was aware of the disapproval in which she was held, and seemed to receive us with malignant humility.

"What do the gentlemen want?" she inquired.

My friend replied: "We have been told that your last child is just like any other child, and not in the least like his brothers. I wanted to verify this. Is it true?"

She gave us a sly glance of anger and answered:

"Oh, no, sir, oh dear no! He's even uglier, mebbe, than the others. I've no luck, no luck at all, they're all that way, sir, all like that, it's something cruel; how can the good Lord be so hard on a poor woman left all alone in the world!"

She spoke rapidly, keeping her eyes lowered, with a hypocritical air, like a scared wild beast. She softened the harsh tone of her voice, and it was amazing to hear these tearful high-pitched words issuing from that great bony body, with its coarse, angular strength, made for violent gesture and wolfish howling.

"We should like to see your child," my friend said.

She appeared to blush. Had I perhaps been mistaken? After some moments of silence she said, in a louder voice: "What would be the use of that to you?"

She had raised her head, and gave us a swift, burning glance.

"Why don't you wish to show him to us?" answered my friend. "There are many people to whom you show him. You know whom I mean."

She started up, letting loose the full fury of her voice.

"So that's what you've come for, is it? Just to insult me? Because my bairns are like animals, eh? Well, you'll not see them, no, no, no, you shan't. Get out of here. I know you all, the whole pack of you, bullying me about like this!"

She advanced towards us, her hands on her hips. At the brutal sound of her voice, a sort of moan, or rather a mew, a wretched lunatic screech, issued from the next room. I shivered to the marrow. We drew back before her.

In a severe tone my friend warned her:

"Have a care, She-devil"—the people all called her She-devil—"have a care, one of these days this will bring you bad luck."

She trembled with rage, waving her arms, mad with fury, and yelling:

"Get out of here, you! What'll bring me bad luck? Get out of here, you pack of beasts, you!"

She almost flew at our throats; we fled, our hearts contracted with horror.

When we were outside the door, my friend asked:

"Well, you've seen her; what do you say to her?"

I answered: "Tell me the brute's history."

And this is what he told me, as we walked slowly back along the white high road, bordered on either side by the ripe corn that rippled like a quiet sea under the caress of a small, gentle wind.

The girl had once been a servant on a farm, a splendid worker,

well-behaved and careful. She was not known to have a lover, and was not suspected of any weakness.

She fell, as they all do, one harvest night among the heaps of corn, under a stormy sky, when the still, heavy air is hot like a furnace, and the brown bodies of the lads and girls are drenched with sweat.

Feeling soon after that she was pregnant, she was tormented with shame and fear. Desirous at all costs of hiding her misfortune, she forcibly compressed her belly by a method she invented, a horrible corset made of wood and ropes. The more the growing child swelled her body, the more she tightened the instrument of torture, suffering agony, but bearing her pain with courage, always smiling and active, letting no one see or suspect anything.

She crippled the little creature inside her, held tightly in that terrible machine; she crushed him, deformed him, made a monster of him. The skull was squeezed almost flat and ran to a point, with the two great eyes jutting right out from the forehead. The limbs, crushed against the body, were twisted like the stem of a vine, and grew to an inordinate length, with the fingers and toes like spiders' legs.

The trunk remained quite small and round like a nut.

She gave birth to it in the open fields one spring morning.

When the women weeders, who had run to her help, saw the beast which was appearing, they fled shrieking. And the story ran round the neighbourhood that she had brought a demon into the world. It was then that she got the name "She-devil."

She lost her place. She lived on charity, and perhaps on secret love, for she was a fine-looking girl, and not all men are afraid of hell.

She brought up her monster, which, by the way, she hated with a savage hatred, and which she would perhaps have strangled had not the *curé*, foreseeing the likelihood of such a crime, terrified her with threats of the law.

At last one day some passing showmen heard tell of the frightful abortion, and asked to see it, intending to take it away if they liked it. They did like it, and paid the mother five hundred francs down for it. Ashamed at first, she did not want to let them see a beast of this sort ; but when she discovered that it was worth money, that these people wanted it, she began to bargain, to dispute it penny by penny, inflaming them with the tale of her child's deformities, raising her prices with peasant tenacity.

In order not to be cheated, she made a contract with them. And they agreed to pay her four hundred francs a year as well, as though they had taken this beast into their service.

The unhopèd-for good fortune crazed the mother, and after that she never lost the desire to give birth to another phenomenon, so that she would have a fixed income like the upper classes.

As she was very fertile, she succeeded in her ambition, and apparently became expert at varying the shapes of her monsters according to the pressure they were made to undergo during the period of her pregnancy.

She had them long and short, some like crabs and others like lizards. Several died, whereat she was deeply distressed.

The law attempted to intervene, but nothing could be proved. So she was left to manufacture her marvels in peace.

She now has eleven of them alive, which bring her in from five to six thousand francs, year in and year out. One only is not yet placed, the one she would not show us. But she will not keep it long, for she is known now to all the circus proprietors in the world, and they come from time to time to see whether she has anything new.

She even arranges auctions between them, when the creature in question is worth it.

My friend was silent. A profound disgust surged in my heart, a furious anger, and regret that I had not strangled the brute when I had her in my hands.

for you

"Then who is the father?" I asked.

"Nobody knows," he replied. "He or they have a certain modesty. He, or they, remain concealed. Perhaps they share in the spoils."

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I had thought no more of that far-off adventure until the other day, at a fashionable watering-place, when I saw a charming and elegant lady, the most skilful of coquettes, surrounded by several men who have the highest regard for her.

I walked along the front, arm-in-arm with my friend, the local doctor. Ten minutes later I noticed a nurse looking after three children who were rolling about on the sand.

A pathetic little pair of crutches lay on the ground. Then I saw that the three children were deformed, hunch-backed and lame; hideous little creatures.

The doctor said to me: "Those are the offspring of the charming lady you met just now."

I felt a profound pity for her and for them.

"The poor mother!" I cried. "How does she still manage to laugh?"

"Don't pity her, my dear fellow," replied my friend. "It's the poor children who are to be pitied. That's the result of keeping the figure graceful right up to the last day. Those monsters are manufactured by corsets. She knows perfectly well that she's risking her life at that game. What does she care, so long as she remains pretty and seductive?"

And I remembered the other, the peasant woman, the She-devil, who sold hers.

OLD JUDAS

THE WHOLE OF THIS DISTRICT WAS AMAZING, MARKED WITH A character of almost religious grandeur and sinister desolation.

In the centre of a great ring of bare hills, where nothing grew but whins and a rare, freakish oak twisted by the wind, there lay a vast, wild tarn, in whose black and stagnant waters shivered thousands of reeds.

A solitary house stood on the banks of this gloomy lake, a small low house inhabited by an old boatman, old Joseph, who lived on the proceeds of his fishing. Every week he carried his fish down to the neighbouring villages, and returned with the simple provisions necessary to his existence.

I had the whim to visit this hermit, and he invited me to come and raise his nets with him.

I accepted.

His boat was a worm-eaten old tub. Thin and bony, he rowed with a quiet, monotonous movement which soothed my spirit, already caught up in the melancholy of the enclosing sky.

Amid this ancient landscape, sitting in this primitive boat, steered by this man from another age, I imagined myself transported to one of the early epochs of the world.

He raised his nets, and threw the fish down at his feet with the gestures of a biblical fisherman. Then he consented to take me to the end of the marsh, and suddenly I saw, on the other bank, a ruin, a gutted hovel, on the wall of which was a cross, a huge red cross: under the last gleams of the setting sun it looked as if it were traced in blood.

"What is that?" I asked.

Instantly the man crossed himself, and answered:

"That is where Judas died."

I was not surprised ; I felt as though I might have expected this strange reply.

But I persisted :

"Judas ? What Judas ?"

He added : "The Wandering Jew, sir."

I begged him to tell me this legend.

But it was better than a legend, it was a piece of history, of almost contemporary history, for old Joseph had known the man.

Once upon a time the hut was occupied by a tall woman, a beggar of sorts, who lived on public charity.

From whom she had got this hovel, old Joseph no longer remembered. One night an old man with a white beard, so old that he looked a centenarian twice over, and could hardly drag one foot after the other, passed by and asked this poor old woman for alms.

She answered :

"Sit down, Father, all here is for all the world, for it comes from all the world."

He sat down on a stone in front of the house. He shared the woman's bread, her bed of leaves, and her house.

He never left her. He had finished his travels.

Old Joseph added :

"It was our Lady the Virgin who permitted that, sir, seeing that a woman had opened her door to Judas."

For this old vagabond was the Wandering Jew.

The country-side did not know this at once, but soon suspected it from the fact that he was always walking, the habit was so strong in him.

Another thing had roused their suspicions. The woman who sheltered the unknown man in her house passed for a Jewess, since she had never been seen at church.

For ten leagues around no one called her anything but "the Jewess."

When the little children of the district saw her coming to beg, they cried out :

"Mother, mother, it's the Jewess!"

She and the old man began to wander round the neighbourhood, holding their hands out at every door, babbling entreaties after every passer-by. They were seen at all hours of the day, on lonely paths, in village streets, or eating a piece of bread in the shade of a solitary tree, in the fierce heat of noon.

And they began to call the beggar "Old Judas."

One day he brought back in his sack two little live pigs which had been given him at a farm because he had cured the farmer of a sickness.

And soon he stopped begging, wholly occupied in leading his pigs about in search of food, guiding them along the tarn, under the solitary oak-trees, and in the little valleys near by. The woman, on the contrary, wandered ceaselessly in quest of alms, but joined him again every evening.

He never went to church, any more than she, and had never been seen to make the sign of the Cross at the wayside shrines. All this caused a deal of gossip.

One night his companion was taken ill with a fever, and began to shake like a rag in the wind. He went to the town to get medicine, then shut himself up with her, and for six days no one saw him.

But the *curé*, having heard that "the Jewess" was about to pass away, came to bring the dying woman the consolations of his religion, and to offer her the last sacrament. Was she a Jewess? He did not know. In any event, he wished to try and save her soul.

He had scarcely knocked at the door when old Judas appeared on the threshold, panting, his eyes blazing, all his long white beard quivering like running water: he screamed words of blasphemy in an unknown tongue, stretching out his thin arms to hinder the priest's entry.

The *curé* tried to speak, offered him money and assistance, but the old man continued to revile him, making the gesture of stoning him.

And the priest retreated, pursued by the beggar's curses.

Next day, old Judas's companion died. He buried her himself in front of the doorway. They were so poor that no one interfered with them.

Once more the man was seen leading his pigs along the tarn and on the hillsides. And several times he began begging for food again. But now he got next to nothing, so many stories were going round about him. And every one knew in what a fashion he had welcomed the *curé*.

He disappeared. It was during Holy Week. No uneasiness was felt.

But on Easter Monday some boys and girls who had gone for a walk up to the tarn, heard a great noise in the hut. The door was shut; the boys broke it open and the two pigs escaped, leaping like deer. They were never seen again.

They all entered, and saw on the ground a few old rags, the beggar's hat, some bones, some dried blood and remains of flesh in the hollow of a skull.

His pigs had eaten him.

And old Joseph added :

"It had happened on Good Friday, at three in the afternoon."

I asked him : "How do you know?"

He replied : "It cannot be doubted."

I did not try to make him understand how natural it was for the famished beasts to eat their suffering master if he had died suddenly in his hut.

As for the cross on the wall, it appeared one morning, and no one knew what hand had painted it that strange colour.

After that, none doubted that the Wandering Jew had died in that place.

I believed it myself for an hour.

THÉODULE SABOT'S CONFESSION

WHENEVER SABOT CAME INTO THE PUBLIC-HOUSE OF MARTINVILLE, a roar of laughter went up in anticipation. The fellow was as good as a play. He had no love for parsons, not he! He ate them alive.

Sabot (Théodule), master joiner, represented the radical party at Martinville. He was a tall, thin man with a sly, grey eye, hair brushed on to his temples, and a thin mouth. When he said, "Our holy father the wash-out" in a certain way he had, the whole company yelled with laughter. He was careful to work on Sunday while mass was going on. Every year he killed his pig on the Monday in Holy Week, so as to have black puddings till Easter, and when the priest passed he always said merrily:

"There's the fellow who's just been swallowing his God out of a pint-pot."

The priest, a stout man, also very tall, feared him for his chaff, which won him many supporters. The Reverend Maritime had a diplomatic mind, and liked subtle methods. For ten years the struggle went on between these two, secret, bitter, and incessant. Sabot was on the town council, and it was thought that he would be made mayor, which would certainly constitute the definite defeat of the church.

The elections were about to take place, and the religious party in Martinville trembled for its security. One morning the priest went off to Rouen, telling his servant that he was going to the archbishop's palace.

Two days later he returned, looking joyful and triumphant. Next day every one knew that the chancel of the church was to be restored. His Lordship had given six hundred francs

towards it out of his own pocket. All the old deal stalls were to be removed and replaced by new ones of oak. It was an important piece of carpentry, and by the evening every one was talking of it.

Théodule Sabot did not laugh.

When he walked through the village next day, neighbours, friends and enemies alike, all asked him jestingly :

"Is it you who's to do the church choir?"

He found nothing to answer, but his heart was black with rage.

"It's a fine job," they added unkindly. "It's worth a good two or three hundred."

Two days later it was known that the work of repair was to be entrusted to Célestin Chambrelan, the joiner at Percheville. Then the rumour was denied, and then it was announced that all the church pews were to be replaced as well. It would cost quite two thousand francs, and they had appealed to the government for the money. There was great excitement.

Théodule Sabot could not sleep. Never, within the memory of man, had a local joiner executed such a task. Then the story ran that the priest was heart-broken at giving this work to a joiner who was a stranger to the village, but that Sabot's opinions were a barrier that prevented the contract from being entrusted to him.

Sabot knew it. At nightfall he betook himself to the rectory. The servant told him that the priest was at church. He went there.

Two lay sisters, sour old spinsters, were decorating the altar for the month of St. Mary, under the direction of the priest. He stood in the middle of the choir, protruding his enormous stomach, and was superintending the labours of the women who, perched on chairs, were arranging flowers round the shrine.

Sabot felt uneasy there, as though he had entered the house of his deadliest foe, but his avarice spurred him on. He came

up cap in hand, taking no notice of the lay sisters, who remained motionless upon their chairs, stupefied with amazement.

"Good evening, parson," he stammered.

"Good evening, joiner," replied the priest without turning his head, engrossed in the work at the altar.

Sabot, who had rather lost his bearings, found nothing more to say. After a pause, however, he added :

"You are making preparations ?"

"Yes," replied Maritime, "we are drawing near to the month of St. Mary."

"Quite, quite," said Sabot, and was silent.

He was by now anxious to leave without speaking at all, but a glance at the choir restrained him. He saw that there were sixteen stalls to be repaired, six on the right and eight on the left, the vestry door occupying two places. Sixteen oak stalls were to be had for three hundred francs at the outside, and with a little good management a clever workman could make a clear two hundred francs on the job. He managed to stammer :

"I've come for the work."

The priest looked surprised.

"What work ?" he asked.

"The work to be done," murmured Sabot, now quite desperate.

At that the priest turned and stared at him, saying :

"Do you mean the repairs to the choir of my church ?"

At the tone adopted by the priest, Théodule Sabot felt a shiver run up his spine, and once more he suffered a violent longing to slink away. But he replied meekly :

"Yes, your Reverence."

The priest crossed his arms on his broad paunch, and said as though thunderstruck with surprise :

"And you . . . you . . . you, Sabot . . . come here and ask me that ! . . . You . . . the only infidel in my parish. . . ."

Why, it would be a scandal, a public scandal. His Lordship would reprimand me ; I might even lose the living."

He paused for a few seconds to regain his breath, then proceeded more calmly :

"I quite understand that it pains you to see a work of such importance entrusted to a joiner from a neighbouring parish. But I cannot do otherwise, unless . . . but no . . . that's impossible. You'd never agree to it, and without that . . . never."

Sabot was now looking at the ranks of pews running right to the west door. Mercy ! was all that to be restored ?

"What must you have ?" he asked. "It can't do any harm telling."

"I must have an overwhelming proof of your good intentions," replied the priest firmly.

"I don't say," murmured Sabot, "I don't say but what an understanding mightn't be come to."

"You must communicate publicly at high mass next Sunday," announced the priest.

The joiner felt himself growing pale and, without answering, asked :

"And the pews, are they all to be done too ?"

"Yes," replied the priest with emphasis, "but later on."

"Well, I don't say," replied Sabot. "I don't say. I'm no atheist, I'm not ; I've no quarrel with religion. What upsets me is the practice of it, but in a case like this I dare say you'd not find me obstinate."

The lay helpers had descended from their chairs and were hidden behind the altar ; they were listening, livid with emotion.

The priest, perceiving that he was victorious, became familiar and jolly at once :

"Splendid ! Splendid ! Now that's very sensible of you, very sensible. Wait and see."

Sabot smiled uncomfortably, and asked :

"Can't this here communion be put off for a bit, just a little bit?"

But the priest resumed his severe expression.

"From the moment that the contract is given to you, I must be certain of your conversion," he said, then continued more mildly:

"You'd better come and confess to-morrow, for I shall have to examine you at least twice."

"Twice? . . ." repeated Sabot.

"Yes," said the priest with a smile. "You see, you need a thorough cleaning, a complete wash. I expect you to-morrow."

"And where'll you do it?" asked the joiner in dismay.

"Why . . . in the confessional."

"What? . . . In that box over there in the corner? Now look here . . . I don't like your box a bit."

"Why not?"

"Why . . . why, I'm not used to it. And I'm a bit hard of hearing too."

The priest showed himself accommodating.

"Very well. Come to my house, to my study. We'll get it done there privately. Does that suit you?"

"Oh, that'll suit me all right, but that box of yours, no!"

"Well, to-morrow then, after the day's work, at six o'clock."

"Right oh! right you are. That's settled. See you to-morrow, parson, and damn the man who goes back on a bargain."

He held out his huge rough hand, on which the priest let his own fall with a loud smack. The echo ran along the vaulted roof and died in the distance behind the organ pipes.

Throughout the following day Théodule Sabot felt uncomfortable. He suffered an apprehension very like the fear one suffers before having a tooth out. At every moment the thought flashed across his mind: "I've got to confess this evening." And his harried soul, the soul of a not very strongly-convinced atheist, was sorely troubled before the vague powerful terror of the divine mystery.

As soon as his work was over he went off to the priest's house. Its owner was waiting for him in the garden, reading his breviary as he walked up and down a small path. He seemed delighted to see him and welcomed him with a hearty laugh.

"Ah—here we are, then! Come in, come in, Monsieur Sabot; no one will eat you."

Sabot entered the house first.

"If it's all the same to you," he faltered, "I'd like to see my little affair through at once like."

"At your service," replied the priest. "My surplice is here. One minute, and I'm ready to listen to you."

The joiner, so distressed that his mind was a blank, watched him put on the white garment with its pleated folds. The priest signed to him:

"Kneel down on that hassock."

But Sabot remained standing, ashamed at having to kneel.

"Does it do any good?" he stammered.

But the priest had become majestic.

"Only upon the knees," he said, "may the tribunal of repentance be approached."

Sabot knelt.

"Recite the Confiteor," said the priest.

"Eh? . . ." asked Sabot.

"The Confiteor. If you no longer know it, repeat one by one the words I am about to utter."

And the priest pronounced the sacred prayer in a slow voice, scanning each word for the joiner, who repeated it after him.

"Now confess," he said.

But Sabot said nothing, not knowing where to begin.

Then the Reverend Maritime came to his aid.

"Since you seem to be rather out of practice, my child, I will question you. We will take the commandments of God one by one. Listen to me and do not distress yourself. Speak very frankly and never be afraid of confessing too much.

" 'Thou shalt worship one God alone and adore Him with all thy heart.' Have you loved anyone or anything as much as God? Have you loved Him with all your soul, with all your heart, with all the strength of your love? "

Sabot perspired with the effort of thought.

"No," he replied. "Oh, no, your Reverence. I love the good God as much as I can. Oh, Lord! Yes, I love Him all right. As for saying I don't love my children, no. I can't say that. As for saying if I had to choose between them and the good God, as for that I won't say. As for saying if I had to lose a hundred francs for love of the good God, as for that I won't say. But I love Him all right, that's quite certain. I love Him just the same."

"You must love Him more than anything," said the priest gravely.

And Sabot, full of goodwill, declared:

"I'll do my best, your Reverence."

" 'Thou shalt not swear vainly by the name of God, nor by any other,' " resumed Maritime. "Have you occasionally sworn oaths? "

"No—oh, no, not that! I never swear, never. Sometimes, in a moment of hot temper like, I may say 'God blast.' But I never swear."

"But that is swearing," said the priest, and added severely: "Don't do it any more. I pass on to the next: 'Thou shalt spend the Sabbath in serving God devotedly.' What do you do on Sundays? "

This time Sabot scratched his ear.

"Well, I serve the good God in the best way I can, your Reverence. I serve Him . . . at home. I work on Sundays. . . ."

The priest magnanimously interrupted him:

"I know you will behave better in the future. I pass over the three next commandments, as I am sure you have not sinned against the two first, and we will take the sixth with the ninth. To proceed: 'Thou shalt not take another's goods, nor retain

them wittingly.' Have you ever in any way taken what did not belong to you?"

Théodule Sabot was indignant:

"Certainly not! Certainly not, your Reverence! I'm an honest man, that I swear. As for saying that I've not once or twice taken an extra hour over a job when I could, as for that I won't say. As for saying that I've never put a few centimes on to a bill, only a few centimes, as for that I won't say. But I'm not a thief, oh, Lord, no!"

"Taking a single centime constitutes a theft," answered the priest severely. "Don't do it again.—'Thou shalt not bear false witness nor lie in any way.' Have you told lies?"

"No! that I haven't. I'm not a liar; that's one of the things I pride myself on. As for saying that I've never told a tall story, as for that I won't say. As for saying that I've never tried to make another fellow believe what wasn't true, when it suited me, as for that I won't say. But as for being a liar, well, I'm no liar."

"You must keep a closer watch upon yourself," said the priest simply. Then he pronounced: "The works of the flesh thou shalt not desire save only in marriage." Have you ever desired or possessed any woman but your own wife?"

"No!" cried Sabot sincerely. "Certainly not, your Reverence! Deceive my poor wife? No! No! Not so much as with the tip of my finger, and no more in thought than in deed. I swear that." He paused for a few moments, and then continued in a lower voice, as though a sudden doubt had assailed him:

"As for saying that when I go to town I don't ever go to a house—you know what I mean, a gay house—and fool about a bit and have a change of skin for once—as for that I won't say. . . . But I pay, your reverence, I always pay; and if you pay, that's that, eh?"

The priest did not insist, and gave him absolution.

Théodule Sabot is at work on the repairs to the choir, and goes to communion every month.

THE RETURN

THE SEA IS FRETTING THE SHORE WITH SMALL RECURRING waves. Small white clouds pass rapidly across the wide blue sky, swept along like birds by the swift wind ; and the village, in a fold of a valley which descends to the sea, lies drowsing in the sun.

By the side of the road, at the very entrance to the village, stands the lonely dwelling of the Martin-Lévesques. It is a little fisherman's cottage with clay walls and a roof of thatch made gay with tufts of blue iris. There is a square patch of front garden the size of a pocket-handkerchief, containing onions, some cabbages, parsley, and *chevril*, and separated from the road by a hedge.

The man is out fishing, and his wife is sitting in front of the house, mending the meshes of a large brown net spread upon the wall like a gigantic spider's web. A little girl of fourteen is sitting near the gate in a cane-chair tilted back and supported against the fence ; she is mending linen, miserable stuff already well darned and patched. Another girl a year younger is rocking in her arms a tiny child still too young to walk or talk, and two mites of two and three are squatting on the ground, opposite each other, digging in the earth with clumsy fingers and throwing handfuls of dust in one another's faces.

No one speaks. Only the baby that is being rocked to sleep cries incessantly in a weak, thin, small voice. A cat is asleep on the window-sill ; some faded pinks at the foot of the wall make a fine patch of white blossom, over which a swarm of flies is humming.

The little girl sewing by the gate cries out abruptly :
" Mother ! "

"What is it?" her mother answers.

"He's here again."

Ever since the morning they have been uneasy, for a man has been prowling round the house, an old man who looks like a beggar. They saw him as they were taking their father to his ship, to see him on board. He was sitting in the ditch opposite their gate. Then, when they came back from the sea-shore, they saw him still looking at the house.

He looked ill and very wretched. For more than an hour he had not stirred; then, seeing that they took him for a bad character, he had got up and gone off, dragging one leg behind him.

But before long they had seen him return with his weary limp, and he had sat down again, a little farther off this time, as though to spy upon them.

The mother and the little girls were afraid. The mother was particularly uneasy, for she was by nature timid, and her husband, Lévesque, was not due back from the sea before nightfall.

Her husband's name was Lévesque, and hers was Martin, and the pair had been baptized Martin-Lévesque. This is why: her first husband had been a sailor named Martin who went every summer to the Newfoundland cod-fisheries. After two years of married life she had borne him a little daughter and was six months gone with another child, when her husband's ship, the *Two Sisters*, a three-masted barque from Dieppe, disappeared.

No news of her was ever heard, no member of the crew returned, and she was believed lost with all hands.

For ten years Madame Martin waited for her man, having a hard struggle to bring up the two children. Then, as she was a fine, strong woman, a local fisherman named Lévesque, a widower with one son, asked her to marry him. She consented, and bore him two other children in three years.

Their life was hard and laborious. Bread was dear, and

meat almost unknown in the household. Sometimes they were in debt to the baker, in the winter, during the stormy months. But the children grew up strong; the neighbours said:

"They're good folk, the Martin-Lévesques. She's as hard as nails, and there's no better fisherman than Lévesque."

The little girl sitting by the fence went on:

"He looks as though he knew us. Perhaps he's some beggar from Épreville or Auzebosc."

But the mother was sure of the truth. No, no, he wasn't a local man, that was certain.

As he remained motionless as a log, his eyes fixed obstinately upon the cottage, Madame Martin lost her temper; fear lending her courage, she seized a spade and went out in front of the gate.

"What are you doing there?" she cried to the vagabond.

"I'm taking the air," he replied in a hoarse voice. "Am I doing you any harm?"

"What are you playing the spy for round my house?" she replied.

"I'm doing no one any harm," he answered. "Can't I sit down by the roadside?"

Not finding an answer, she went back into the house.

Slowly the day dragged by. Round about midday the man disappeared. But near five o'clock he wandered past once more. He was not seen again that evening.

Lévesque came home at nightfall and was told of the affair.

"Some dirty rascal slinking about the place," he decided.

He went to bed with no anxiety, while his wife dreamed of this tramp who had stared at her with such strange eyes.

When dawn came a gale was blowing, and the sailor, seeing that he could not put out to sea, helped his wife to mend the nets.

About nine o'clock the eldest girl, one of Martin's children, who had gone out for some bread, ran in with a scared face, and cried:

"He's back again, mother."

Her mother felt a prick of excitement ; very pale, she said to her husband :

" Go and tell him not to spy on us like this, Lévesque ; it's fairly getting on my nerves."

Lévesque was a big fisherman with a brick-red face, a thick red beard, blue eyes with gleaming black pupils, and a strong neck always well wrapped up in a woollen scarf, to protect him from the wind and rain of the open sea. He went out calmly and marched up to the tramp.

And they began to talk.

The mother and children watched from the distance, trembling with excitement.

Suddenly the unknown man got up and accompanied Lévesque towards the house.

Madame Martin recoiled from him in terror. Her husband said :

" Give him a bit of bread and a mug of cider ; he hasn't had a bite since the day before yesterday."

The two of them entered the cottage, followed by the woman and the children. The tramp sat down and began to eat, his head lowered before their gaze.

The mother stood and stared at him ; the two eldest daughters, Martin's children, leaned against the door, one of them holding the youngest child, and stared eagerly at him. The two mites sitting among the cinders in the fire-place stopped playing with the black pot, as though to join in gaping at the stranger.

Lévesque sat down and asked him :

" Then you've come from far ? "

" From Cette."

" On foot, like that ? "

" Yes. When you've no money, you must."

" Where are you going ? "

" I was going here."

" Know anyone in these parts ? "

" Maybe."

They were silent. He ate slowly, although ravenous, and took a sip of cider between each mouthful of bread. His face was worn and wrinkled, full of hollows, and he had the air of a man who has suffered greatly.

Lévesque asked him abruptly :

"What's your name?"

He answered without raising his head :

"My name is Martin."

A strange shudder ran through the mother. She made a step forward as though to get a closer view of the vagabond, and remained standing in front of him, her arms hanging down and her mouth open. No one spoke another word. At last Lévesque said :

"Are you from these parts?"

"Yes, I'm from these parts."

And as he at last raised his head, his eyes met the woman's and remained gazing at them; it was as though their glances were riveted together.

Suddenly she said in an altered voice, low and trembling :

"Is it you, husband?"

"Yes, it's me," he said slowly.

He did not move, but continued to munch his bread.

Lévesque, surprised rather than excited, stammered :

"It's you, Martin?"

"Yes, it's me," said the other simply.

"Where have you come from?" asked the second husband.

He told his story :

"From the coast of Africa. We foundered on a reef. Three of us got away, Picard, Vatinel, and me. Then we were caught by savages, who kept us twelve years. Picard and Vatinel are dead. An English traveller rescued me and brought me back to Certe. And here I am."

Madame Martin had begun to cry, hiding her face in her apron.

"What are we to do now?" said Lévesque.

"Is it you that's her husband?" asked Martin.

"Yes, it's me," replied Lévesque.

They looked at one another and were silent.

Then Martin turned to the circle of children round him and, nodding towards the two girls, asked:

"Are those mine?"

"Yes, they're yours," said Lévesque.

He did not get up; he did not kiss them. He only said:

"God, they're big!"

"What are we to do?" repeated Lévesque.

Martin, perplexed, had no idea. Finally he made up his mind:

"I'll do as you wish. I don't want to wrong you. But it's annoying when I think of the house. I've two children, you've three. Each has his own. As for the mother, is she yours, or shall I have her? I agree to whatever you like, but as for the house, that's mine, for my father left it me, I was born in it, and the lawyer's got the papers about it."

Madame Martin was still crying, stifling her short gasps in the blue canvas of her apron. The two tall girls had drawn nearer and were looking uneasily at their father.

He had finished eating, and said in his turn:

"What are we to do?"

Lévesque had an idea:

"We must get the priest. He'll decide."

Martin rose, and as he went towards his wife she flung herself upon his breast, sobbing:

"It's you, husband! Martin, my poor Martin, it's you!"

She held him in her arms, suddenly stirred by a breath of the past, by an anguished rush of memories that reminded her of her youth and of her first kisses.

Martin, much affected, kissed her bonnet. The two children by the fire-place both began to cry when they heard their mother cry, and the youngest of all, in the arms of the younger Martin daughter, howled in a shrill voice like a fife out of tune.

Lévesque stood up and waited.

"Come on," he said. "We must get it put straight."

Martin let go of his wife and, as he was looking at his two daughters, their mother said :

"You might kiss your dad."

They came up together, dry-eyed, surprised, a little frightened. He kissed them one after another, on both cheeks, with a loud, smacking kiss. The baby, seeing the stranger draw near, screamed so violently that it nearly fell into convulsions.

Then the two men went out together.

As they passed the Café du Commerce, Lévesque asked :

"How about a little drink ?"

"Yes, I could do with some," declared Martin.

They went in and sat down in the room, which was still empty. Lévesque shouted :

"Hey, there, Chicot, two double brandies, and the best ! It's Martin, he's come back ; Martin, you know, my wife's man ; Martin of the *Two Sisters*, that was lost."

The barman came up, three glasses in one hand and a pitcher of water in the other, a red-faced, podgy, pot-bellied man. In a calm voice he asked :

"Ah ! So here you are, then, Martin ?"

Martin answered :

"Here I am."

THE CASTAWAY

"REALLY, DEAR, I THINK YOU MUST BE MAD TO GO FOR A WALK in the country in this weather. For the last two months you've had the oddest ideas. You drag me willy-nilly to the seaside, though you never thought of such a thing before in all the forty-five years of our married life. You insist on Fécamp, a melancholy hole, and now you've got such a passion for rushing about, you who could never be induced to stir out, that you want to walk about the fields on the hottest day of the year. Tell d'Apreval to go with you, since he falls in with all your whims. As for me, I'm going in to have a rest."

Madame de Cadour turned to her old friend :

"Are you coming with me, d'Apreval ?"

He bowed and smiled with old-world gallantry.

"Where you go, I go," he said.

"Very well, go and get sunstroke," said Monsieur de Cadour, and re-entered the Hôtel des Bains to lie down on his bed for an hour or two.

As soon as they were alone, the old woman and her aged companion started off. She clasped his hand and said very softly :

"At last ! At last !"

"You are mad," he murmured. "I assure you you're mad. Think of the risk. If that man. . . ."

She started violently.

"Oh, Henry, don't call him that man."

"Well," he continued in a brusque voice, "if our son has any notions, if he suspects us, he's got you, he's got us both. You've done without seeing him for forty years. What's the matter with you now, then ?"

They had followed the long road which leads from the sea to the town. They turned to the right to climb the hill of Étretat. The white road unwound itself before them under the blazing rain of sunlight. They walked slowly in the burning heat, taking short steps. She had taken her friend's arm and was walking straight ahead with a fixed, haunted stare.

"So you've never seen him again either?" she said.

"No, never."

"Is it possible?"

"My dear friend, don't let us begin this eternal discussion all over again. I have a wife and children, just as you have a husband; so that each of us has everything to fear from public opinion."

She did not answer. She was thinking of her lost youth, of old, unhappy, far-off things.

She had been married by her family, as a young girl is married. She hardly knew her betrothed, a diplomat, and later she lived with him the life of any woman of fashion.

Then, however, a young man, Monsieur d'Apréval, married like herself, fell passionately in love with her; and during a long absence of Monsieur de Cadour on a political mission in India, she yielded to him.

Could she have resisted? Could she have denied herself? Would she have had the courage, the strength, not to yield?—for she loved him too. No, certainly no! It would have been too hard! She would have suffered too deeply! How crafty and cruel is life! Can we avoid these temptations, or fly from inevitable destiny? How can a woman, alone, deserted, without love, without children, continue to run away from a passion surging in her? It is as though she fled from the light of the sun, to live to the end of her life in darkness.

And how plainly she remembered now the little things, his kisses, his smile, the way he stopped at the door to look at her, whenever he came to her house. What happy days, her only happy days, so soon over!

Then she discovered that she was with child ; what agony !

Oh ! the long terrible journey to the south, her misery, her incessant fear, her life hidden in the lonely little cottage on the shores of the Mediterranean, in the depths of the garden she dared not go beyond.

How well she remembered the long days she spent lying under an orange-tree, her eyes lifted to the round flaming fruit in the green foliage ! How she longed to go out, to go down to the sea, whose sweet scent came to her over the wall, whose little waves she heard upon the beach ; and dreamed perpetually of its wide blue surface glittering in the sun, flecked with white sails, and rimmed by a mountain. But she dared not go through the gate. Supposing she were recognised, in this state, her altered figure crying her shame !

And the days of waiting, the last few tormenting days ! The fears ! The threatening pains ! Then the awful night ! What misery she had endured !

What a night it had been ! How she had moaned and screamed ! She could see even now the pale face of her lover, kissing her hand every minute, the doctor's smooth countenance, the nurse's white cap.

And what a convulsion she had felt in her heart at the child's shrill feeble cry, the first effort of a man's voice !

And the day after ! The day after ! The only day of her life on which she had seen and kissed her son, for never afterwards had she as much as set eyes on him !

Then, after that time, the long empty life, the thought of this child floating always in the void of her mind ! She had never seen him again, not once, the little being who was her flesh and blood, her son ! He had been seized, carried off, and hidden ! She knew only that he was being brought up by Norman peasants, that he had himself become a peasant, that he had married, with a good dowry from the father whose name he did not know.

How many times, in the last forty years, she had longed to go away to see him, to kiss him! She did not think of him as grown up. She dreamed always of that scrap of humanity she had held for one day in her arms, clasped to her tortured body.

How many times she had said to her lover: "I can hold out no longer; I must see him; I am going!"

Always he had restrained her, held her back. She would not know how to contain herself, how to master her emotion. The man would guess, and would exploit the secret. She would be ruined.

"How is he?" she said.

"I don't know. I've never seen him again either."

"Is it possible? To have a son and not know him! To be afraid of him, to have cast him away as a disgrace!"

It was horrible.

They were still walking up the long road, oppressed by the blazing sun, still mounting the interminable hillside.

"It's like a judgment, isn't it?" she continued. "I've never had another child. I could no longer fight my desire to see him; it's haunted me for forty years. A man couldn't understand these things. Remember that I am very near death. And I shall not have seen him again . . . never again; is it possible? How can I have waited so long? I've thought of him all my life, and what a terrible existence the thought has made it! Not once have I awakened, not once, do you hear, without my first thought being for him, for my child! How is he? Oh, how guilty I feel before him! Ought one to fear the world in such a case? I should have left all and followed him, brought him up, loved him. I should have been happier then, surely. But I did not dare. I was a coward. How I have suffered! Oh, those poor abandoned creatures, how they must hate their mothers!"

She stopped abruptly, choked with sobs. The whole valley

was deserted and silent in the overpowering blaze of sunlight. Only the crickets uttered their harsh, ceaseless note in the thin brown grass at the roadside.

"Sit down for a little," he said.

She let him lead her to the edge of the ditch, and sank down upon the grass, burying her face in her hands. Her white hair, falling in curls on each side of her face, became dishevelled, and she wept, torn by her bitter grief.

He remained standing in front of her, uneasy, not knowing what to say to her.

"Come . . . be brave," he murmured.

"I will be," she said, rising to her feet. She dried her eyes and walked on with the shaky steps of an old woman.

A little further on the road ran under a group of trees which hid several houses. They could now hear the regular vibrant shock of a blacksmith's hammer on the anvil. Soon they saw, on the right, a cart halted before a kind of low house, and, in a shed, two men shoeing a horse.

Monsieur d'Apreval went up to them.

"Pierre Bénédic's farm?" he asked.

"Take the road on the left," answered one, "right by the little inn, and go straight on; it's the third after Poret's. There's a young pine by the fence. You can't miss it."

They turned to the left. She was going very slowly now, her legs flagging, her heart thudding so violently that it snatched her breath away. At every step she muttered, as though it were a prayer:

"My God! Oh, my God!"

A violent access of emotion contracted her throat, making her totter on her feet as though she had been hamstrung.

Monsieur d'Apreval, nervous and rather pale, said sharply:

"If you can't control yourself better, you'll betray us at once. Try to master your feelings."

"How can I?" she faltered. "My child! When I think that I'm about to see my child!"

They followed one of those little lanes that run between one farmyard and another, shut in between a double row of beeches along the roadside.

Suddenly they found themselves in front of a wooden gate shaded by a young pine-tree.

"Here it is," he said.

She stopped short and looked round.

The yard, which was planted with apple-trees, was large, stretching right up to the little thatched farmhouse. Facing it were the stables, the barn, the cow-house, and the chicken-run. Under a slate-roofed shed stood the farm vehicles, a two-wheeled cart, a wagon, and a gig. Four calves cropped the grass, which was very green where the trees shaded it. The black hens wandered into every corner of the enclosure.

There was no sound to be heard; the door of the house was open, but no one was in sight.

They entered the yard. At once a black dog leapt out of an old barrel at the foot of a large pear-tree and began to bark furiously.

Against the wall of the house, on the way to the door, four beehives stood upon a plank, the straw domes in a neat line.

Halting in front of the house, Monsieur d'Apréval shouted :

"Is anyone in?"

A child appeared, a little girl of about ten, dressed in a bodice and woollen petticoat, with bare and dirty legs. She looked timid and sullen, and stood still in the doorway, as though to defend the entry.

"What d'you want?" she said.

"Is your father in?"

"No."

"Where is he?"

"I dunno."

"And your mother?"

"She's with the cows."

"Will she be back soon?"

"I dunno."

The old woman cried out abruptly in a hurried voice, as though fearing to be forcibly dragged away :

"I won't go without seeing him."

"We'll wait, my dear."

As they turned round, they caught sight of a peasant woman coming towards the house, carrying two heavy-looking tin pails on which the sun from time to time flashed with a brilliant white flame.

She was lame in the right leg, and her chest was muffled in a rusty brown knitted garment, stained and bleached by rain and sun. She looked like some poor servant, dirty and wretched.

"There's mother," said the child.

When she was near her dwelling she regarded the strangers with an evil, suspicious look ; then went into the house as though she had not seen them.

She looked old ; her face was hollowed, yellow, hard, the wooden face of rustics.

Monsieur d'Apreeval called her back.

"I say, we came in to ask you to sell us two glasses of milk."

Having set down her pails, she reappeared in the doorway and muttered :

"I don't sell milk."

"We're very thirsty. The lady is old and very tired. Can't we get something to drink ? "

The peasant woman stared at him with surly, uneasy eyes. At last she made up her mind.

"Seeing you're here, I'll give you some all the same," she said, disappearing into the house.

Then the child came out carrying two chairs, which she set under an apple-tree ; and the mother came, in her turn, with two foaming cups of milk that she placed in the visitors' hands.

She remained standing in front of them as though to keep watch on them and guess their intentions.

"You're from Fécamp?" she said.

"Yes," replied Monsieur d'Apreval, "we're there for the summer."

Then, after a pause, he added: "Could you sell us chickens every week?"

She hesitated, then replied;

"I might. Would you be wanting young birds?"

"Yes, young ones."

"What do you pay for them at market?"

D'Apreval, who did not know, turned to his companion: "What do you pay for chicken, dear—young ones?"

"Four francs and four francs fifty," she faltered, her eyes full of tears.

The farmer's wife looked sideways at her, much surprised, and asked:

"Is the poor lady ill, that she's cryin'?"

He did not know what to answer, and stammered:

"No. . . . No. . . . She . . . she lost her watch on the way, a beautiful watch, and it grieves her. If anyone picks it up, let us know."

Madame Bénédic thought this queer, and did not answer.

Suddenly she said:

"Here's my husband."

She alone had seen him come in, for she was facing the gate. D'Apreval started violently; Madame de Cadour nearly fell as she turned frantically round in her chair.

A man was standing ten paces off, leading a cow at the end of a cord, bent double, breathing hard.

"Damn the brute!" he muttered, taking no notice of the strangers.

He passed them, going towards the cowshed, in which he disappeared.

The old woman's tears were suddenly dried up; she was too bewildered for speech or thought: her son, this was her son!

D'Aprenal, stabbed by the same thought, said in a troubled voice :

"That is Monsieur Bénédic, is it not?"

"Who told you his name?" asked the farmer's wife, distrustful of them.

"The blacksmith at the corner of the high road," he replied.

Then all were silent, their eyes fixed on the door of the cowshed, which made a sort of black hole in the wall of the building. They could see nothing inside, but vague sounds were to be heard, movements, steps muffled in the straw strewn on the ground.

He reappeared on the threshold, wiping his brow, and came back towards the house with a long slow step that jerked him up at every pace he took.

Again he passed in front of the strangers without appearing to notice them, and said to his wife :

"Go and draw me a mug of cider; I be thirsty."

Then he entered his dwelling. His wife went off to the cellar, leaving the two Parisians by themselves.

Madame de Cadour was quite distracted.

"Let us go, Henry, let us go," she faltered.

D'Aprenal took her arm, helped her to rise, and supporting her with all his strength—for he felt certain that she would fall—he led her away, after throwing five francs on to one of the chairs.

As soon as they had passed through the gate, she began to sob, torn with grief, and stammering :

"Oh! oh! Is this what you've made of him?"

He was very pale.

"I did what I could," he answered harshly. "His farm is worth eighty thousand francs. Many middle-class children haven't such a marriage-portion."

They walked slowly back, without speaking another word. She was still sobbing; the tears ran unceasingly from her eyes and rolled down her cheeks.

At last they stopped, and the pair reached Fécamp.

Monsieur de Cadour was awaiting them for dinner. He began to laugh and cried out at sight of them :

"There you are, my wife's got a sunstroke. I'm delighted at it. Upon my word, I think she's been off her head for some time past."

Neither answered ; and as the husband, rubbing his hands, inquired : "At all events, have you had a nice walk?"

D'Apreval replied :

"Delightful, my dear fellow, perfectly delightful."

WHAT THE COLONEL THOUGHT

"I'M AN OLD MAN NOW," SAID COLONEL LAPORTE. "I'VE GOT the gout, and my legs are as stiff as the posts in a fence, but, damn me, if a woman, a pretty woman, ordered me to go through the eye of a needle, I believe I'd jump into it like a clown through a hoop. That's how I shall die; it's in the blood. I'm a veteran ladies' man, I am, an old buffer of the old school. The sight of a woman, a pretty woman, stirs me to my boots. I give you my word it does.

"And we're all like that, gentlemen, we Frenchmen. We remain knights to our dying day, the knights of love and hazard, now that they've done away with God, whose real body-guard we used to be.

"But no one can take woman from our hearts. There she is and there she stops. We love her, and we'll go on loving her; we'll do any sort of madness for her, so long as France remains on the map of Europe. And even if France is wiped out, there will always be Frenchmen.

"As for me, when a woman, a pretty woman, looks at me, I feel capable of anything. Why, damn me, when I feel her eyes, her damned wonderful eyes, peering into me, sending a flame through my veins, I want to do Lord knows what, to fight, to struggle, to smash the furniture, to show that I'm the strongest, bravest, boldest, and most devoted of mankind.

"And I'm not the only one, not by a long way; the whole French Army's just the same, I swear it. From the private up to the general, we all go forward to the end when there's a woman, a pretty woman, in the case. Remember what Joan of Arc made us do in the old days. Well, I bet you that if a woman, a pretty woman, had taken command of the army

the night before Sedan, when Marshal MacMahon was wounded, we'd have crossed the Prussian lines, by God ! and drunk our brandy from their cannons.

" We didn't need a Trochu in Paris, but a St. Geneviève.

" That reminds me of a little story of the war which proves that, in a woman's presence, we're capable of anything.

" I was a plain captain in those days, and was commanding a detachment of scouts fighting a rear-guard action in the middle of a district overrun by the Prussians. We were cut off and constantly pursued ; we were worn out in body and mind, perishing of exhaustion and hunger.

" Well, before the next day we had to reach Bar-sur-Tain or we were done for, cut off and wiped out. How we had escaped so long I don't know. We had twelve leagues to march during the night, on empty stomachs, through the snow, which was thick on the ground and still falling. I thought : ' This is the end ; my poor lads will never get through.'

" We had eaten nothing since the previous day. All day long we stayed hidden in a barn, huddled against one another for greater warmth, incapable of motion or speech, sleeping by fits and starts, as men do when utterly exhausted with fatigue.

" It was dark by five o'clock, with the livid darkness of a snowy day. I shook my men ; many refused to rise, unable to move or to stand up, their joints stiff with the cold and so forth.

" In front of us stretched the plain, a perfect hell of a plain, without a scrap of cover, with the snow coming down. It fell and fell, like a curtain, in white flakes, hiding everything under a heavy mantle, frozen, thick and dead, a coverlet of icy wool. It was like the end of the world.

" ' Come on, boys. Fall in.'

" They looked at it, the white dust coming down from the sky, and seemed to think : ' We've had enough ; as well die here.'

" So I pulled out my revolver, saying :

" 'I shoot the first man who funks.'

" And off they went, very slowly, like men whose legs are utterly done for.

" I sent four scouts on in front, three hundred yards ahead ; the remainder followed higgledy-piggledy, a confused column, in an order dictated only by the extent of their exhaustion and the length of their steps. I placed the strongest in the rear, with orders to hurry on the laggards with bayonet thrusts . . . in the back.

" The snow buried us alive, so to speak, powdering caps and capes without thawing upon them, making phantoms of us, as though we were the ghosts of soldiers dead of weariness.

" I said to myself : ' We'll never get out of this without a miracle.'

" From time to time we halted for a few minutes for the sake of those who could not keep up. Then no sound could be heard but the faint whisper of the snow, the almost inaudible murmur made by the rush and swirl of the falling flakes.

" Some of the men shook themselves, others did not move.

" Then I would order them to continue the march. Up went the rifles on to their shoulders, and with drowsy limbs they plodded on again.

" Suddenly the scouts came in ; something was alarming them. They had heard voices in front of us. I sent six men and a sergeant. And I waited.

" Suddenly a sharp cry, a woman's scream, pierced the heavy silence of the snow, and in a few minutes two prisoners were brought before me, an old man and a girl.

" I questioned them in a low voice. They were fleeing from the Prussians, who had occupied their house that evening, and who were drunk. The father had been afraid for his daughter, and without even telling their servants, they had both escaped in the dark.

" I at once realised that they were people of the middle class, or even better.

" 'Come with us,' I said to them.

" Off we went. As the old man knew the country, he acted as our guide. The snow stopped falling; the stars came out and the cold grew quite terrible. The young girl, who held her father's arm, walked with tottering steps, in obvious distress. Several times she murmured: 'I can't feel my feet any longer,' and as for me, I suffered worse to see the poor little woman dragging herself so wearily through the snow.

" Suddenly she stopped.

" 'Father,' she said, 'I'm so tired I can go no further.'

" The old man wanted to carry her, but he could not even lift her off the ground, and with a deep sigh she fainted.

" They formed a circle round her. As for me, I marked time where I stood, not knowing what to do, and unable to make up my mind to abandon the man and his child.

" Then one of my men, a Parisian who had been nicknamed Slim Jim, suddenly said:

" 'Come on, you fellows, we must carry the young lady, or damn me if we're decent Frenchmen.'

" I believe I swore with pure pleasure.

" 'By God, that's good of you, boys; I'll take my share in it too.'

" The trees of a small wood were faintly visible on the left through the darkness. Several men fell out and soon returned with a bundle of branches intertwined to form a litter.

" 'Who'll lend his cape?' said Slim Jim. 'It's for a pretty girl, boys.'

" And ten capes fell round his feet. In a second the girl was lying on the warm garments, and lifted on to six shoulders. I was in front on the right, and, by Jove! I was pleased to bear the burden.

" We went off as though we'd had a glass of wine, with more life and fire. I even heard jokes. You see, Frenchmen only need a woman to become electrified.

" The soldiers had almost formed up again in proper ranks,

heartened and warmed. An old irregular who was following the litter, awaiting his turn to replace the first of his comrades who fell out, murmured to his neighbour in a tone loud enough for me to overhear :

“ ‘ I’m not young any longer, but, damn it all, there’s nothing like the sex for putting courage into a man’s belly.’ ”

“ Until three o’clock in the morning we went forward almost without a halt. Then suddenly the scouts doubled back again, and soon the whole detachment was lying down in the snow, a mere vague shadow on the ground.

“ I gave orders in a low voice, and behind us I heard the dry metallic crackle of rifles being cocked.

“ For out in the middle of the plain something strange was stirring. It looked like an enormous animal moving along, lengthening out like a snake or gathering itself together into a ball, dashing off abruptly, now to the right, now to the left, halting, then starting off again.

“ Suddenly this wandering shape approached us, and I saw, coming up at a fast trot, one behind the other, twelve Uhlans who were lost, and looking for their way. They were now so close that I could plainly hear the loud breathing of the horses, the jingling of their accoutrements, and the creaking of their saddles.

“ I cried : ‘ Fire ! ’ ”

“ Fifty shots broke the silence of the night. Then four or five more reports rang out, then one all by itself, and when the blinding glare of the burnt powder had faded, we saw that the twelve men and nine of their horses had fallen. Three animals were galloping wildly away, one of them dragging behind it the body of its rider, hanging from the stirrup by one foot, bumping and bounding furiously.

“ Behind me a soldier laughed, a terrible laugh. Another said :

“ ‘ That makes a few widows.’ ”

“ Perhaps he was married. A third added :

" 'It didn't take long.'

" A head was thrust out from the litter.

" 'What is happening?' asked the girl. 'Is there fighting?'

" 'It's nothing, Mademoiselle,' I replied. 'We have just dispatched a dozen Prussians.'

" 'Poor wretches!' she murmured; but as she was cold, she disappeared again under the soldiers' capes.

" Off we went again. We marched for a long time, but at last the sky grew pale. The snow became bright, luminous, and gleaming, and a line of warm colour appeared in the East.

" A distant voice cried:

" 'Who goes there?'

" The whole detachment halted, and I went forward to reassure the sentry. We were arriving in the French lines.

" As my men filed past headquarters, an officer on horseback, to whom I had just told our story, asked in a loud voice, as he saw the litter go by:

" 'What have you got in there?'

" A fair, smiling little face, with disordered hair, promptly appeared, and replied:

" 'It's me, Monsieur.'

" A laugh went up among the men, and our hearts leaped for pure joy.

" Then Slim Jim, who was marching beside the litter, waved his cap and shouted:

" '*Vive la France!*'

" And I don't know why, but I felt quite stirred, I thought the gesture so brave and gallant.

" I felt as though we had just saved the country, had done something which other men would not have done, something simple, something truly patriotic.

" I'll never forget that little face of hers, and if I were asked for my opinion on the abolition of drums and bugles, I would propose substituting for them a pretty girl in each regiment. It would be better than playing the *Marseillaise*. Good Lord,

what a spirit it would put into a private to have a madonna like that, a-living madonna, marching beside the colonel."

He paused for a few seconds, then resumed with an air of conviction, nodding his head :

"Yes, we're great lovers of women, we Frenchmen."



A WALK

WHEN OLD LEVAS, BOOK-KEEPER IN THE SERVICE OF MESSRS. Labuze and Company, left the shop, he stood for some moments dazzled by the brilliance of the setting sun. All day long he had worked in the yellow light of a gas-jet, in the depths of the back part of the shop, which looked on to a courtyard as narrow and deep as a well. So dark was the little room in which he had spent his days for the past forty years that, even in the height of summer, artificial light was necessary, except sometimes between eleven and three.

It was always damp and cold there; and the smell from this sort of pit under the window came into the gloomy room, filling it with an odour of decay and drains.

For forty years Monsieur Levas had been arriving at this prison at eight o'clock each morning, and staying there till seven at night, bent over his ledgers, writing with the savage concentration of a good subordinate.

He was now making three thousand francs a year, having begun at fifteen hundred francs. He had remained a bachelor, his means not permitting him to take a wife. And, never having had anything, he did not desire much. From time to time, however, wearying of his monotonous and endless task, he would formulate a Platonic wish: "Lord, if I had five thousand a year, I'd have an easy time of it." But he never had an easy time, having never had anything but his monthly salary.

His life had gone by without adventures, without passions, almost without hopes. The facility of dreaming, planted in every man, had never blossomed in the narrow bed of his ambitions.

At the age of twenty-one he had gone into Labuze and Company. And he had never come out.

In 1856 his father died, and in 1859 his mother. Since then the only event had been a change of lodgings in 1868, his landlord having proposed to raise the rent.

Every day, at six o'clock precisely, his alarm-clock made him leap out of bed with its fearful clatter, like a chain being unwound. Twice, however, once in 1866, and once in 1874, the mechanism had gone wrong, without his ever having found out why. He dressed, made his bed, swept out his room, and dusted his arm-chair and the top of his chest of drawers. These tasks took an hour and a half.

Then he went out, bought a roll at Lahure's bakery, where he had known eleven different proprietors without the shop ever changing its name, and started off, eating his bread.

His entire existence had therefore taken place in the dark, narrow office, always covered with the same wall-paper. He had come into it in his youth as assistant to Monsieur Brument and with the ambition to take his place. He had taken his place, and hoped for nothing more.

All the harvest of memories which other men gather in the course of life, the unexpected happenings, the happy or tragic loves, the adventurous journeys, all the chances of a free existence, had passed him by. Days, weeks, months, seasons, years, were all alike. At the same hour each day he rose, went out, arrived at the office, lunched, left the office, dined, and went to bed, without anything having ever interrupted the regular monotony of the same actions, the same events, and the same thoughts.

Once upon a time he had looked at his fair moustache and curly hair in the little round mirror left behind by his predecessor. Now, every evening, before going, he contemplated in the same mirror his white moustache and his bald forehead. Forty years had gone by, long and swift, empty as a day of sorrow, alike as the hours of a sleepless night. Forty years of which

nothing remained, not even a memory, not even a grief since the death of his parents. Nothing.

On this day Monsieur Levas stood dazzled, at the street-door, by the brilliance of the setting sun ; instead of returning home, he thought of taking a little walk before dinner, as he did four or five times a year.

He reached the boulevards, where a flood of people streamed past under the budding trees. It was a spring evening, one of those first evenings of generous warmth which thrill the heart with a madness of life.

Monsieur Levas walked on with the rickety gait of old age. There was a gleam of gaiety in his eye ; he was happy because the rest of the world was merry and the air was warm.

He reached the Champs-Élysées and continued to walk, freshened by the gusts of youth with which the wind caressed him.

The whole sky was aflame, and the Arc de Triomphe was a dark bulk silhouetted against the brilliant background of the horizon, like a giant straddling over a house on fire. When he drew near the huge monument, the old book-keeper realised that he was hungry, and entered a restaurant for dinner.

He dined in front of the shop, on the pavement, off sheep's trotters, a salad, and asparagus ; and Monsieur Levas had the best meal he had eaten for a long time. He washed down his Brie cheese with half a bottle of good claret ; then he took a cup of coffee, which was unusual with him, and after that a small glass of liqueur brandy.

When he had paid, he felt quite lively and merry, even a little excited. He said to himself : " What a glorious night ! I'll go on as far as the entrance to the Bois de Boulogne it will do me good."

He started off again. An old song, which a girl who had

been his neighbour used once upon a time to sing, recurred obstinately into his head.

“Quand le bois reverdit,
Mon amoureux me dit :
Viens respirer, ma belle,
Sous la tonnelle.”

He hummed it endlessly, beginning again and again. Night had fallen over Paris, an airless night, as close as an oven. Monsieur Levas walked along the Avenue of the Bois de Boulogne and watched the carriages go by. They came on with their gleaming eyes, one after another, allowing a glimpse of an embracing couple, the woman in a light dress, the man in black.

It was one long procession of lovers, driving under the warm and starry sky. Continually they came, went by, came, went by, side by side in the carriages, silent, clasped to each other, lost in the illusion and fever of their desires, in the shuddering longing for the next embrace. The warm air seemed filled with swift, wandering kisses. They spread a strange tenderness through the air, making it more stifling than ever. A fever spread through the air from these intertwined couples, these people inflamed with the same expectation, the same thought. All these carriages filled with love-making brought with them their own atmosphere, subtle and disturbing.

Monsieur Levas, a little tired at the end of his walk, sat down on a bench to watch the passage of these cabs heavy with love. Almost at once a woman drew near and sat down beside him.

“Hallo, darling,” she said.

He made no answer. She continued :

“Let me love you, dearie ; you’ll find me so kind.”

“You are making a mistake, Madame,” he said. She put her arm through his.

"Come on, don't be a silly boy ; listen. . . ."

He had risen, and walked away, a feeling of tightness round his heart.

A hundred yards further on another woman accosted him.

"Come and sit beside me for a while, dearie !"

"Why do you follow this trade ?" he said to her.

She stood in his way, and her voice was changed, hoarse and bitter.

"God, I don't do it for fun."

"Then what drives you to it ?" he insisted gently.

"One must live, worse luck."

And she went off with a little song on her lips.

Monsieur Levas was bewildered. Other women passed him, called to him, invited him. He felt as though something black and oppressive hung above his head.

He sat down on a bench. The carriages were still rolling past.

"I should have done better not to come," he thought ;
"I'm quite put out."

And he began to think of all this love, venal or passionate, all these kisses, bought or free, which were passing before his eyes.

Love ! He knew nothing of it. In all his life he had known but two or three women, chance meetings, unsought ; his means had allowed him no luxuries. And he thought of the life he had led, so different from every one else's, so sombre, so gloomy, so dull, so empty.

There are some people who have no luck. And suddenly, as though a thick veil had been torn aside, he saw clearly the misery, the infinite, monotonous misery of his life, past, present, and to come ; the last days like the first, nothing before him, nothing behind him, nothing round him, nothing in his heart ; nothing anywhere.

Still the line of carriages went by. Always he saw, appearing and disappearing with the swift passage of the open vehicle,

the two inside, silently embracing. It seemed to him as though the whole human race was passing by, drunk with joy, pleasure, and happiness. And he watched them alone, alone, all alone. He would still be alone to-morrow, always alone, alone, as no other creature in the world is alone.

He got up, walked a few steps, and, quickly tired, as though he had just finished a long walk, sat down on the next bench.

What was he waiting for? What was he hoping for? Nothing. He thought how good it must seem, in old age, to hear the chatter of little children as you come home at night. It must be sweet to grow old surrounded with those who owe their lives to you, love you, caress you, tell you those ridiculous, delightful things that warm your heart and console you for everything.

And thinking of his empty room, the clean, sad little room into which no one but himself had ever gone, a feeling of distress oppressed his soul. It seemed to him even more melancholy than his little office.

No one ever came to it; no one ever spoke in it. It was dead, dumb; it lacked even an echo of a human voice. It seemed as though walls must hold something of the people who live between them, something of their ways, their faces, their speech. Houses lived in by happy families are more cheerful than the houses of the miserable. His room was empty of memories, like his life. And the thought of returning to it alone, of getting into bed, of going through all the movements and duties of every evening, was horrible to him. And, as though to get further away from this sinister dwelling-place and from the moment when he must return to it, he rose, and, suddenly reaching the first path in the Bois, he turned into a little copse, to sit down on the grass.

He heard, around him, above him, everywhere, a confused, immense, continuous roar, made up of innumerable different noises, a dull roar, near and distant, a vast vague quivering of

life: the breath of Paris, breathing like a colossal living creature.

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The sun, already high in the heavens, threw a flood of light upon the Bois de Boulogne. A few carriages were driving up and down, and groups of riders were trotting gaily past.

A young couple walked along a lonely path. Suddenly the woman, lifting her eyes, caught sight of something brown in the branches. She pointed to it, surprised and uneasy.

"Look. . . . What is that?"

Then with a cry she collapsed into the arms of her companion, who had to lower her on to the ground.

The keepers, promptly summoned, let down from the tree the body of an old man, hanged by his braces.

It was discovered that death had taken place the previous evening. Papers found on the man showed that he was a book-keeper at Messrs. Labuze and Company, and that his name was Levas.

Death was attributed to suicide from a cause unknown. Possibly temporary insanity?

MOHAMMED-FRIPOUILLE

"SHALL WE HAVE OUR COFFEE ON THE ROOF?" ASKED THE captain.

"Yes, by all means," I replied.

He rose. It was already dark in the room, lighted only by the inner courtyard, as is the custom in Moorish houses. In front of the high, pointed windows, creepers fell from the wide balcony on which the warm summer evenings were spent. Nothing but fruit remained upon the table, huge African fruits, grapes as large as plums, soft figs with purple flesh, yellow pears, long fat bananas, dates from Tougourt in a basket of esparto-grass.

The Moorish servant opened the door, and I ascended the staircase, sky-blue walls were lit from above by the gentle light of the dying day.

Soon I uttered a deep sigh of contentment, as I reached the balcony. It dominated Algiers, the harbour, the roadstead and the distant coast-line.

The house which the captain had purchased was an ancient Arab dwelling, situated in the centre of the old town, amid the labyrinthine lanes in which swarms the strange population of the coasts of Africa.

Below, the flat square roofs descended like a giant's staircase to the sloping roofs of the European quarter. Beyond these could be seen the masts of the ships at anchor, and then the sea, the open sea, blue and calm under the calm blue sky.

We lay down on mats, our heads supported by cushions; while slowly sipping the delicious native coffee, I watched the earliest stars come out in the darkening blue. They were dimly to be glimpsed, so distant, so pale, as yet scarcely lit.

A light, winged warmth caressed our skins. Sometimes, too, hotter, heavy gusts, instinct with a vague scent, the scent of Africa; they seemed the near-by breath of the desert, come over the peaks of the Atlas Mountains. The captain, lying on his back, observed:

"What a country, my dear fellow! How sweet life is here! How peculiarly delicious rest is here! Nights like these are made for dreaming!"

I was still watching the birth of the stars, with a curiosity at once indolent and lively, with drowsy happiness.

"You really ought to tell me something about your life in the South," I murmured.

Captain Marret was one of the oldest officers in the African Army, a soldier of fortune, formerly a spahi, who had carved out his career with the point of his sword.

Thanks to him, and to his connections and friends, I had been able to make a magnificent trip in the desert; and I had come that night to thank him before returning to France.

"What kind of story would you like?" he said. "I've had so many adventures during my twelve years in the sand that I no longer remember any separate one."

"Tell me about the Arab women," I replied.

He did not answer, but remained lying on his mat, his arms bent back and his hands beneath his head; now and then I caught the scent of his cigar, the smoke of which rose straight up towards the sky in the windless night.

Suddenly he burst out laughing.

"Yes, I'll tell you a funny incident that dates from my earliest days in Algeria. In those days we had some queer specimens in the African Army; they're no longer to be seen, they no longer happen. They'd have interested you enough to make you spend your whole life in this country.

"I was a plain spahi, a little fellow of twenty, a fair-haired young devil, supple and active, a real Algerian soldier. I was attached to the military post at Boghar. You know Boghar,

the place they call the balcony of the South. From the summit of the fort you've seen the beginning of that land of fire, devastated, naked, tortured, stony, and reddened. It's the real antechamber of the desert, the superb blazing frontier of that immense stretch of tawny, empty spaces.

"There were forty of us spahis at Boghar, a company of convict soldiers, and a squadron of African lancers, when the news came that the Ould-Berghi tribe had murdered an English traveller. Lord knows how he got into the country; the English are possessed of the devil.

"Justice had to be done for this crime against a European, but the commanding officer hesitated to send out an expedition, thinking that an Englishman really wasn't worth so much fuss.

"Well, as he was talking the matter over with the captain and the lieutenant, a spahi cavalry sergeant, who was waiting to report, suddenly offered to go and punish the tribe if he were given six men only.

"In the South, as you know, things are freer than in a garrison town, and there's a sort of comradeship between the officer and his men which you don't find elsewhere. The captain burst out laughing.

"'You, my lad?'

"'Yes, Captain, and if you like I'll bring back the whole tribe prisoners.'

"The C.O. was a whimsical fellow, and took him at his word.

"'You'll start to-morrow with six men of your own choosing, and if you don't perform your promise, look out for trouble!'

"The sergeant smiled under his moustache.

"'Have no fears, Colonel. My prisoners will be here by noon on Wednesday at the latest.'

"This sergeant, Mohammed-Fripouille, as he was called, was a truly amazing fellow, a Turk, a real Turk, who had entered

the service of France after a somewhat obscure and no doubt chequered career. He had travelled in many lands, in Greece, Asia Minor, Egypt, and Palestine, and must have left behind him a pretty thick trail of misdeeds. He was a real bashi-bazouk, a bold rascal, ferocious, and gay with a placid Oriental gaiety. He was stout, very stout in fact, but as supple as a monkey, and rode superbly. His moustaches were unbelievably long and thick, and always gave me a confused impression of a crescent moon and a scimitar. He had an exacerbated hatred for the Arabs, and treated them with cunning and horrible cruelty, perpetually inventing new tricks, ghastly turns of calculated treachery.

"He was also incredibly strong and preposterously daring.

" 'Choose your men, my lad,' said the C.O. to him.

"Mohammed took me. The gallant fellow trusted me, and I remained devoted to him, body and soul, as a result of his choice of me, which gave me as much pleasure as the cross of honour that I won later on.

"Well, we started off next morning at dawn, just the seven of us. My comrades, the sort of bandits, of pirates who, after marauding and vagabonding round every possible country, end by taking service in some foreign legion. In those days our army in Africa was full of these rascals, splendid soldiers, but utterly unscrupulous.

"Mohammed had given each of us some ten rope-ends to carry, each about a yard long. I was also loaded, as being the youngest and lightest, with a whole length of rope, a hundred yards long. When he was asked what he proposed to do with all this string, he replied with his sly calm air :

" 'It's for Arab-fishing.'

"And he winked slyly, a trick he had learnt from a veteran Parisian *chasseur d'Afrique*.

"He rode at the head of our troop, his head swathed in the red turban he always wore in the desert, smiling with pleasure under his enormous moustache.

"He was a fine sight, that huge Turk, with his powerful belly, his colossal shoulders, and his placid expression. He was mounted on a white horse, of medium size, but very strong, and the rider seemed ten times too big for his mount.

"We had entered a little ravine, stony, bare, and yellow, which drops down to the valley of the Chélif, and were talking of our expedition. My comrades spoke with every conceivable different accent, for among them were to be found a Spaniard, two Greeks, an American, and three Frenchmen. As for Mohammed-Fripouille, he had an extraordinary stutter of his own.

"The sun, the terrible sun, the sun of the South, quite unknown on the other side of the Mediterranean, fell upon our shoulders; we went forward at a walking pace, as always in those parts.

"All day we advanced without meeting either a tree or an Arab.

"At about one in the afternoon we had halted beside a little spring which flowed between the stones, and eaten the bread and dried mutton which we carried in our haversacks; then, after twenty minutes' rest, we had started off again.

"At last, at about six in the evening, after a long detour imposed upon us by our leader, we discovered a tribe encamped behind a conical hill. The low brown tents made dark spots upon the yellow ground, and looked like large desert mushrooms growing at the foot of the red hillock calcined by the sun.

"They were our men. A little further on, at the edge of a dark-green field of esparto-grass, the tethered horses were feeding.

"'Gallop,' order Mohammed, and we arrived in the centre of the encampment like a hurricane. The frenzied women, clad in white rags which drooped and billowed round them, hastily entered their dens of canvas, crouching and crawling,

shrieking like hunted animals. The men, on the contrary, came up from all sides, attempting to defend themselves.

"We rode straight for the loftiest tent, the chief's.

"We kept our swords sheathed, following the example of Mohammed, who was galloping in a curious manner; he remained absolutely immobile, bolt upright on the little horse, which struggled madly to support his mighty bulk. The tranquillity of the rider, with his long moustaches, contrasted strangely with the liveliness of the animal.

"The native chief came out of his tent as we arrived in front of it. He was a tall thin man, black, with a shining eye, a bulging forehead, and eyebrows shaped like the arc of a circle.

" 'What do you want?' he cried in Arabic.

"Mohammed reined in his horse with a jerk, and answered in the same language:

" 'Was it you that killed the English traveller?'

" 'You've no right to question me,' said the agha in a loud voice.

"All around me was a sound like the muttering of a storm. The Arabs came up from all sides, hustled us, made a ring round us, shouted wildly. They looked like fierce birds of prey, with their great hooked noses, their thin bony faces, their wide garments shaken by their gestures.

"Mohammed was smiling, his turban on one side, excitement showing in his eye; I saw little quivers of pleasure run through his sagging fleshy wrinkled cheeks.

"In a voice of thunder which dominated the clamour, he replied:

" 'Death to him who has given death.'

"He thrust his revolver into the agha's brown face. I saw a little smoke rise from the barrel; then a pink froth of brains and blood gushed from the chief's forehead. As though struck by lightning he collapsed upon his back, throwing his arms apart, which raised the trailing skirts of his burnous like wings.

"I thought my last hour had come, the tumult around us was so frightful.

"Mohammed had drawn his sabre ; we followed his example. With windmill strokes he held off those who pressed him most closely, shouting :

" ' I'll spare the lives of those who surrender ; death to the rest.'

"And seizing the nearest in his Herculean fists, he laid him across the saddle and bound his hands, shouting to us :

" ' Do as I do, and sabre those who resist.'

"In five minutes we had captured some twenty Arabs, whose wrists we fastened securely. Then we pursued the fugitives, for at sight of our naked swords there had been a general flight. We collected about thirty more captives.

"The plain was filled with white, scurrying figures. The women dragged their children along, uttering shrill screams. The yellow dogs, like jackals, leapt round us, barking and showing their white fangs.

"Mohammed, who seemed out of his wits with joy, dismounted at one bound, and seizing the rope I had brought, said :

" ' Careful, now, boys ; two of you dismount.'

"Then he made a ludicrous and ghastly thing ; a necklace of prisoners, or rather a necklace of hanged men. He had firmly bound the two wrists of the first captive, then he made a noose round his neck with the same cord, with which he next secured the second captive's arms, and then knotted it round that man's neck. Our fifty prisoners soon found themselves bound in such a manner that the slightest attempt to escape on the part of one of them would have strangled both him and his two neighbours, and they were forced to march at an exactly even pace, without altering the gap between each of them by the slightest hair's-breadth, or else be promptly caught like hares in a snare.

"When this curious task was accomplished, Mohammed

began to laugh, the silent laugh which shook his belly without a sound coming from his mouth.

" 'That's the Arab chain,' he said.

" We too began to roar with laughter at the prisoners' scared piteous faces.

" 'Now, boys,' cried our leader, 'fasten a stake at each end.'

" We attached a stake to each end of this ribbon of ghost-like captives, who remained as motionless as though turned to stone.

" 'And now for dinner,' announced the Turk.

" A fire was lit and a sheep roasted, which we divided with our bare hands. Then we ate some dates found in the tents, drank some milk procured in the same way, and picked up some silver jewellery left behind by the fugitives.

" We were peacefully finishing our meal when I perceived, on the hill facing us, a singular assemblage. It was the women who had recently fled, only the women. And they were running towards us. I pointed them out to Mohammed-Fripouille.

" He smiled.

" 'It's our dessert,' he cried.

" 'Quite so, the dessert!'

" They came up, galloping madly, and soon we were bombarded with stones, which they flung at us without pausing in their onrush. We saw that they were armed with knives, tent-pegs, and broken pottery.

" 'Get on your horses,' yelled Mohammed.

" It was high time. The attack was terrible. They were come to free the prisoners, and strove to cut the rope. The Turk, realising the danger, flew into a mad rage and shouted: 'Sabre them!—sabre them!—sabre them!' And as we remained inactive, uneasy at this new sort of attack, hesitating to kill women, he rushed upon the invaders.

" Alone he charged that battalion of ragged females; the brute proceeded to put them to the sword, working like a

galley-slave, in such a frenzy of rage that a white form dropped every time his arm swept down.

"His onslaught was so terrible that the frightened women fled as quickly as they had come, leaving behind them a dozen dead or wounded wretches, whose crimson blood stained their white garments.

"Mohammed returned towards us with a distorted face, repeating :

" ' Off with you, boys, off we go ; they're coming back.' "

" And we fought a rear-guard action, slowly leading our prisoners, who were paralysed with the fear of being strangled.

" It was striking twelve next day when we arrived at Boghar with our chain of throttled captives. Only six had died on the way. But we had frequently to undo the knots from one end of the convoy to another, for every shock choked ten or more captives at once."

The captain paused. I did not answer. I thought of the strange country wherein such things were to be seen, and gazed at the black sky and its innumerable company of shining stars.

THE KEEPER

AFTER DINNER WE WERE RECOUNTING SHOOTING ADVENTURES and accidents.

An old friend of ours, Monsieur Boniface, a great slayer of beasts and drinker of wine, a strong and debonair fellow, full of wit, sense, and a philosophy at once ironical and resigned, which revealed itself in biting humour and never in melancholy, spoke abruptly :

" I know a shooting story, or rather a shooting drama, that's queer enough. It's not in the least like the usual tale of the kind, and I've never told it before ; I didn't suppose that anyone would be interested in it.

" It's not very pleasant, if you know what I mean. I mean to say that it does not possess the kind of interest which affects, or charms, or agreeably excites.

" Anyhow, here it is.

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" In those days I was about thirty-five, and mad on shooting. At that time I owned a very lovely piece of land on the outskirts of Jumièges, surrounded by forests and excellent for hares and rabbits. I used only to spend four or five days there a year, by myself, the limited accommodation not permitting of my bringing a friend.

" I had installed there as keeper an old retired policeman, a good man, hot-tempered and very conscientious in the performance of his duties, a terror to poachers, and afraid of nothing. He lived by himself, some way out of the village, in a little house, or rather a hovel, consisting of two ground-floor rooms, a kitchen and a small storeroom, and of two more

rooms on the first floor. One of these, a sort of box just large enough for a bed, a chest of drawers, and a chair, was reserved for me.

"Old Cavalier occupied the other. In saying that he was alone in this cottage, I expressed myself badly. He had taken with him his nephew, a hobbledehoy of fourteen, who fetched the provisions from the village two miles off, and helped the old man in his daily duties.

"This youth was tall, thin, and somewhat stooping; his hair was so pale a yellow that it looked like the down on a plucked hen, and so thin that he appeared to be bald. He had enormous feet and colossal hands, the hands of a giant.

"He squinted a little and never looked anyone straight in the face. He gave one the impression that he occupied in the human race the place that the musk-secreting beasts hold in the animal kingdom. He was a polecat or a fox, was that boy.

"He slept in a sort of hole at the top of the little staircase which led to the two rooms. But during my short visits to the Pavilion—I called this hovel the Pavilion—Marius gave up his nest to an old woman from Écorcheville named Céleste, who came in to cook for me, old Cavalier's concoctions being by no means good enough.

"Now you know the characters and the setting. Here is the story.

"It was in 1854, the fifteenth of October: I remember the date, and I shall never forget it.

"I left Rouen on horseback, followed by my dog, a big setter from Poitou, broad-chested and heavy-jowled, who rummaged about in the bushes like a Pont Audemer spaniel.

"My bag was on the saddle behind me, and my gun slung round me. It was a cold day, with a high and mournful wind, and dark clouds rode in the sky.

"While ascending the slope of Canteleu I gazed at the broad valley of the Seine, through which the river meandered with serpentine twists as far as the horizon. On the left all

the steeples of Rouen lifted to the sky, and on the right the view was blocked by the far-off tree-clad hills. I passed through the forest of Roumare, going now at a trot, now at a walking pace, and at about five o'clock I arrived at the Pavilion, where old Cavalier and Céleste were waiting for me.

"For the last ten years, at the same season, I had been presenting myself in the same way, and the same mouths welcomed me with the same words :

" ' Good day, your honour. Your honour's health is good ? ' "

" Cavalier had scarcely altered at all. He stood up to the passage of time like an old tree ; but Céleste, especially in the last four years, was becoming almost unrecognisable.

" She was bent nearly double, and although still active, she walked with the upper part of her body so bowed that it formed almost a right angle with her legs.

" The old woman was very devoted to me ; she always seemed much affected at seeing me again, and whenever I left she used to say :

" ' Think, this is maybe the last time, your honour. ' "

" And the poor servant's heart-broken, frightened farewell, her desperate resignation to inevitable death, so surely close upon her, stirred my heart strangely each year.

" I dismounted, and while Cavalier, with whom I had shaken hands, was leading my horse to the little shed which did duty for a stable, I entered the kitchen, which also served as the dining-room, followed by Céleste.

" Then the keeper joined us again. From the very first I saw that his face had not its customary expression. He seemed preoccupied, ill at ease, worried.

" ' Well, Cavalier, ' I said to him, ' is everything going on all right ? ' "

" ' Yes and no, ' he murmured. ' There's something that isn't at all all right. ' "

" ' Well, what is it, man ? ' I asked. ' Tell me all about it. ' "

"But he shook his head.

"No, Monsieur, not yet. I don't want to pester you with my worries like this, when you've only just arrived."

"I insisted, but he absolutely refused to tell me about it before dinner. His expression, however, told me that it was serious.

"Not knowing what to say to him, I asked :

"And what about the game? Have we plenty?"

"Oh, yes, there's plenty of game, plenty. I kept my eyes open, thanks be to God."

"He said this with such desperate seriousness that it was positively comical. His large grey moustaches looked ready to fall off his lips.

"Suddenly I realised that I had not yet seen his nephew.

"And Marius, where has he gone to? Why hasn't he shown up?"

"The keeper started; he wheeled sharply and faced me.

"Well, Monsieur, I'd sooner tell you the story straight out; yes, I'd sooner do that. It's about him that this thing's on my mind."

"Ah. Well, where is he?"

"In the stable, Monsieur; I'm expecting him to turn up any moment."

"Well, what has he been doing?"

"This is the story, Monsieur. . . ."

"But the keeper hesitated none the less, his voice was changed and shook, his face was suddenly graven with deep wrinkles, the wrinkles of old age.

"Slowly he continued :

"Here it is. I noticed this winter that someone was laying snares in the wood of Roseraies, but I couldn't catch the man. I spent night after night there, Monsieur; but no good. And during that time snares began to appear on the Écorcheville side. I grew thin with rage. But as for catching the thief, impossible!

You would have said the scoundrel was warned beforehand of my visits and my plans.

“ ‘ But one day, while brushing Marius’s breeches, his Sunday breeches, I found forty sous in his pocket. Now where had the boy got that from ?

“ ‘ I thought it over for a week, and I noticed that he was in the habit of going out ; he used to go out just when I came back to bed, Monsieur.

“ ‘ Then I watched him, but I never suspected the truth, not for a moment. And one morning, after going to bed before his eyes, I promptly got up again, and tracked him. And as for tracking, there’s no one to touch me, Monsieur.

“ ‘ And I caught him, Monsieur, setting snares on your land—Marius, my nephew, your keeper’s nephew !

“ ‘ My blood boiled, and I nearly killed him on the spot. I gave him such a thrashing—oh, Lord ! how I did beat him ; and I promised him that when you came he would have another from me in your presence, for the sake of the lesson.

“ ‘ That’s all. I’ve gone thin with grief. You know what it means to be crossed like that. But what would you have done, now ? He’s got no father or mother. I’m the only one of his own blood the boy’s got ; I’ve brought him up ; I couldn’t turn him out, could I ?

“ ‘ But I’ve told him that if he does it again, it’s the end, the end, more’s the pity. There ! Was I right, Monsieur ? ’

“ I held out my hand to him, and replied :

“ ‘ You were right, Cavalier ; you’re a good fellow.’

“ He rose.

“ ‘ Thank you, Monsieur. Now I’ll go and fetch him : he must be punished, for the sake of the lesson.’

“ I knew that it was useless to attempt to dissuade the old man from any plan he had already formed. So I let him have his own way.

“ He went off to fetch the lad, and brought him back, holding him by the ear.

"I was seated on a cane-chair, wearing the grave visage of a judge. Marius appeared to me to have grown; he was even uglier than the year before, with his evil, cunning expression. And his great hands looked monstrous.

"His uncle shoved him in front of me, and said in his military voice :

" ' Ask pardon from the master. '

"The boy did not utter a word.

"Then, seizing him under the arms, the ex-policeman lifted him off the ground and began to thrash him with such violence that I got up to stop the blows.

"The child was now bawling :

" ' Mercy !—mercy !—mercy ! I promise. . . . '

"Cavalier lowered him on to the ground and, forcing him on to his knees by pressing upon his shoulders, said :

" ' Ask pardon. '

" ' I ask pardon, ' murmured the young scamp, with downcast eyes.

"Thereupon his uncle lifted him to his feet and dismissed him with a blow which nearly knocked him down again.

"He made off, and I did not see him again that evening.

"But Cavalier seemed terribly distressed.

" ' He's a bad character, ' he said, and throughout dinner he kept on saying :

" ' Oh ! how it grieves me, Monsieur ; you don't know how it grieves me. '

"I tried to console him, but in vain. I went up to bed early, so as to be out shooting at break of day. My dog was already asleep upon the floor at the foot of my bed, when I blew out my candle.

"I was awakened in the middle of the night by the furious barking of Bock. I realised at once that my room was full of smoke. I leapt out of bed, lit the light, ran to the door, and opened it. A swirl of flames entered. The house was on fire.

"I promptly shut the strong oak door again, and dragging

on my breeches, I first of all lowered my dog from the window with a rope made of twisted sheets; then, throwing down my clothes, my game-bag and my gun, I made my escape in the same way.

"Then I began to shout with all my might:

" 'Cavalier! Cavalier! Cavalier!'

"But the keeper did not wake; the old policeman was a heavy sleeper.

"Through the lower windows I saw that the whole ground-floor was nothing but a blazing furnace, and I saw too that it had been filled with straw to assist the fire.

"So it had been purposely fired!

"I resumed my furious shouts:

" 'Cavalier!'

"Then the thought came to me that the smoke was suffocating him. An idea leaped into my mind; slipping two cartridges into my gun, I fired straight at his window.

"The six panes crashed into the room in a welter of splintered glass. This time the old man had heard, and his terrified figure appeared at the window, clad in his night-shirt; he was terrified more than anything by the violent glare which lit up the whole front of his dwelling.

" 'Your house is on fire,' I shouted. 'Jump out of the window, quick, quick!'

"The flames suddenly darted through the lower windows, licked the wall, reached him, were on the point of surrounding him. He jumped and landed on his feet like a cat.

"It was high time. The thatched roof cracked in the middle, above the staircase, which formed a sort of chimney for the fire below; an immense red sheaf of flame rose in the air, widened, like the jet of a fountain, and sowed a shower of sparks round the cottage. In a few seconds it was nothing but a mass of flames.

" 'How did it catch fire?' asked Cavalier, bewildered.

" 'Someone set fire to the kitchen,' I replied.

" 'Who could have done it?' he murmured.

" Suddenly I guessed.

" 'Marius!' I said.

" The old man understood.

" 'Oh! Holy Mother of God!' he stammered; 'that's why he didn't come in again.'

" But a horrible thought ran through my brain. I cried:

" 'And Céleste? Céleste?'

" He did not answer, but the house collapsed before our eyes, forming nothing but a huge brazier, blinding, bleeding; a terrible pyre in which the poor woman could be no more than a glowing cinder, a cinder of human flesh.

" We had not heard a single cry.

" But, as the fire was reaching the neighbouring shed, I suddenly thought of my horse, and Cavalier ran to set it free.

" He had scarcely opened the stable-door when a swift, supple form passed between his legs, throwing him flat on his nose. It was Marius, running for all he was worth.

" In a second the man picked himself up. He wanted to run after the wretch, but realising that he could not hope to catch him and maddened with an ungovernable rage, he yielded to one of those momentary, thoughtless impulses which can be neither foreseen nor restrained. He picked up my gun, which was lying upon the ground close by, set it to his shoulder, and before I could move, pulled the trigger, without even knowing whether the gun was loaded.

" One of the cartridges which I had put in to give warning of the fire had not gone off; the charge caught the fugitive full in the back, and flung him on his face, covered with blood. He began to scrabble at the ground with hands and knees, as though trying to go on running upon all fours, like mortally-wounded hares when they see the hunter coming up.

" I dashed to him. The child was already in his death-throes. He died before the flames were extinguished, without having uttered a word.

"Cavalier, still in his night-shirt, with bare legs, stood near us, motionless, bewildered.

"When the people arrived from the village, they took away my keeper, who was like a madman.

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"I appeared at the trial as a witness, and narrated the facts in detail, without altering a single incident. Cavalier was acquitted. But he left the district the same day, and disappeared.

"I have never seen him again.

"That's my shooting story, gentlemen."

BERTHE

MY OLD FRIEND—SOMETIMES ONE HAS FRIENDS MUCH OLDER than oneself—my old friend Doctor Bonnet had often invited me to stay with him at Riom. I did not know Auvergne at all, and I decided to go and see him about the middle of the summer of 1876.

I arrived on the morning train, and the first figure I saw upon the station platform was the doctor's. He was dressed in grey, and wore a round, black, broad-brimmed hat of soft felt, whose high crown narrowed as it rose, like the chimney of an anthracite stove; it was a true Auvergne hat, and positively smelt of charcoal-burning. Clad thus, the doctor had the appearance of an old young man, with his slender body wrapped in the light-coloured coat, and his large head with its white hair.

He embraced me with the manifest pleasure of a provincial greeting the arrival of a long-desired friend. Extending his arm and pointing all round him he exclaimed proudly:

"Here is Auvergne."

I saw nothing but a line of mountains in front of me, whose summits, like truncated cones, must have been extinct volcanoes.

Then, raising his finger towards the name of the town written upon the front of the station, he said:

"Riom, fatherland of magistrates, pride of the law courts, which should rather have been the fatherland of doctors."

"Why?" I asked.

"Why?" he answered with a laugh. "Turn the name round and you have '*mori*'—to die. . . . That's why I installed myself in this neighbourhood, young man."

And, delighted with his jest, he led me away, rubbing his hands.

As soon as I had swallowed a cup of coffee, I had to go and see the old city. I admired the chemist's house, and the other notable houses, all black, but as pretty as toy houses, with their fronts of carved stone. I admired the statue of the Virgin, patron saint of butchers, and even heard, in this connection, the story of an amusing adventure which I will relate some other day, when Doctor Bonnet said to me :

"Now I must beg five minutes in which to go and see a patient, and then I will take you up the hill of Châtel-Guyon, so as to show you, before lunch, the general view of the town and of the whole range of the Puy-de-Dôme. You can wait on the pavement ; only going straight up and down again."

He left me opposite one of those old provincial mansions, dark, closed, silent, gloomy. This one seemed to me to have a particularly sinister physiognomy, and I soon discovered the reason. All the large windows on the first floor were blocked up to half their height by stout wooden shutters. Only the top halves opened, as though someone had wished to prevent the creatures shut up in this great stone box from seeing into the street.

When the doctor came down again, I told him what I had noticed.

"You were not mistaken," he replied ; "the poor creature shut up in there must never see what is going on outside. She's a madwoman, or rather an idiot, or an imbecile—what you Normans call a 'Niente.'"

"Yes, it's a sad story, and an extraordinary pathological case into the bargain. Would you like me to tell it you?"

I told him yes.

"All right," he said. "Twenty years ago now, the owners of that house, my employers, had a child, a girl, just like any other girl.

"But I soon saw that although the body of the little creature

was developing admirably, her intelligence was remaining dormant.

"She walked at a very early age, but she absolutely refused to speak. At first I thought her deaf; then, later, I found out that she could hear perfectly, but did not understand. Violent noises made her tremble; they frightened her, but she could never trace the cause of them.

"She grew up; she was superb, and dumb, dumb through lack of intelligence. I tried every means to bring a gleam of light into her brain; nothing was of avail. I fancied that she recognised her nurse; once weaned, she did not recognise her mother. She never knew how to speak that word, the first uttered by children, the last murmured by soldiers dying on the battle-field: 'Mother.' Sometimes she attempted inarticulate mutterings, but nothing more.

"When the weather was fine, she laughed all the time, uttering gentle cries like the twittering of a bird; when it rained, she wept and groaned in a melancholy, terrifying way, like the mourning of dogs howling at death.

"She liked to roll in the grass like a young animal, to run about like a mad creature, and every morning she clapped her hands if she saw the sun coming into her room. When the window was opened, she clapped her hands and moved about in her bed, for them to dress her at once.

"She seemed to draw no distinction between people, between her mother and her servant, between her father and me, between the coachman and the cook.

"I was fond of her unhappy parents, and went to see them almost every day. I often dined with them, which made me notice that Berthe (she had been named Berthe) appeared to recognise the dishes and prefer some to others.

"She was twelve years old at that time. She looked like a girl of eighteen, and was taller than I am.

"So the idea came into my head of developing her greed,

and of attempting by this means to introduce a sense of difference into her mind, of forcing her, by the difference between tastes, by the scale of flavours, if not to think, at least to make instinctive distinctions, which would be, if nothing else, a physical stirring of her brain.

"Then, by appealing to her senses, and carefully choosing those which would best serve our purpose, we wanted to produce a sort of reaction of the body upon the intelligence, and thus gradually augment the insentient working of her brain.

"One day, therefore, I set in front of her two plates, one of soup, one of very sweet vanilla custard. I made her taste them alternately. Then I left her free to make a choice. She ate the plateful of custard.

"I soon made her very greedy, so greedy that she seemed to have nothing in her head but the idea, or rather the desire, of eating. She recognised dishes perfectly, holding out her hand towards those which she liked and eagerly seizing them. She cried when they were taken away.

"Then I had the notion of teaching her to come to the dining-room at the sound of the bell. It took a long time, but I succeeded. In her vague understanding became firmly established a connection between the sound and the taste, a relation between two senses, an appeal from one to the other, and consequently a kind of concatenation of ideas, if one can call this sort of instinctive link between two organic functions an idea.

"I carried my experiment still further, and taught her—with what pains!—to recognise meal-times on the dial of the clock.

"For a long time I was unable to call her attention to the hands, but I succeeded in making her notice the striking mechanism. The method I employed was simple: I stopped the ringing of the bell, and every one rose to go to table when the little brass hammer struck twelve.

"I tried in vain to teach her to count the strokes. Every time

she heard the chime she ran to the door ; but little by little she must have realised that all the chimes had not the same value with regard to meals ; and her eye, guided by her ear, was often fixed upon the dial.

" Noticing this, I took care to go every day at twelve and at six, and as soon as it came to the moment she was waiting for, I placed my finger on the figure twelve and on the figure six. I soon observed that she was following attentively the advance of the little brass hands, which I had often pushed round in her presence.

" She had understood ! Or, it would be truer to say, she had grasped it. I had succeeded in awakening in her the knowledge, or rather the sensation, of time, as one can do with carp, though they have not the advantage of clocks, by feeding them at exactly the same moment every day.

" Once this result had been attained, all the timepieces in the house occupied her attention to the exclusion of everything else. She spent her life in looking at them, listening to them, waiting for the hours. A rather funny incident happened. The striking mechanism of a pretty Louis XVI clock, that was hanging over the head of her bed, ran down, and she noticed it. For twenty minutes she stared at the hands, waiting for ten o'clock to strike. But when the hand had passed the figure, she was left bewildered at hearing nothing, so bewildered that she remained sitting there, stirred no doubt by one of those strong emotions which lay hold on us in the face of great catastrophies. And she had the curious patience to sit in front of that little instrument until eleven o'clock, to see what would happen. Again she heard nothing, very naturally. Then, seized abruptly with the mad rage of a creature deceived and tricked, or with the terror inspired by a frightful mystery, or with the furious impatience of a passionate creature confronted by an obstacle, she seized the tongs from the fire-place and struck the clock with such force that she smashed it to pieces instantly.

"So her brain worked and calculated, in an obscure way, it is true, and within a very limited range, for I could not make her distinguish between people as she did between hours. In order to produce a stirring of intelligence in her mind, it was necessary to appeal to her passions, in the physical sense of the word.

"We soon had another proof of this ; alas ! it was a terrible one.

"She had grown into a superb creature ; she was a true type of the race, an admirable, stupid Venus.

"She was now sixteen, and I have rarely seen such perfection of form, suppleness, and regularity of features. I said she was a Venus ; so she was, a fair, full-figured, vigorous Venus, with large eyes, clear and empty, blue like flax-flowers, and a large mouth with round, greedy, sensual lips, a mouth made for kisses.

"One morning her father came into my room with a curious expression, and sat down without even replying to my greeting.

" ' I want to speak to you about a very serious matter,' he said. ' Could . . . Berthe get married ? '

"I started with surprise.

" ' Berthe get married ! ' I exclaimed. ' It's impossible ! '

" ' Yes,' he resumed, ' I know . . . but think, doctor . . . you see . . . perhaps . . . we had hoped . . . if she had children . . . it would be a great shock for her, a great happiness . . . and who knows whether motherhood might not awaken her intelligence ? '

"I was very perplexed. It was true. It was possible that the novelty of the experience, the wonderful maternal instinct which throbs in the hearts of beasts as strongly as in the hearts of women, which makes the hen fling herself upon the jaws of the dog in order to protect her little ones, might lead to a revolution, a violent disturbance in that dormant brain, might even set going the motionless mechanism of her mind.

"Suddenly, too, I remembered an example from my own

experience. Some years previously I had owned a little bitch, a retriever, so stupid that I could get nothing out of her. She had puppies, and became in one day, not intelligent, but almost the equal of many poorly-developed dogs.

"I had scarcely perceived this possibility before the longing increased in me to get Berthe married, not so much out of friendship for her and for her poor parents as out of scientific curiosity. What would happen? It was a strange problem.

"So I said to the father:

"'You may be right . . . we might try . . . try by all means . . . but . . . but . . . you'll never find a man who'll consent to it.'

"'I have found one,' he said in a low voice.

"I was amazed.

"'A decent fellow?' I stammered. 'A man in your own walk of life?'

"'Yes . . . absolutely,' he replied.

"'Ah. . . . And . . . might I ask you his name?'

"'I was just coming to tell you and ask your advice. It is Monsieur Gaston du Boys de Lucelles.'

"I nearly exclaimed: 'The swine!' but I kept my mouth shut, and after a pause I murmured:

"'Yes, quite all right. I see no obstacle.'

"The poor man shook my hand.

"'They shall be married next month,' he said.

"Monsieur Gaston du Boys de Lucelles was a young scamp of good family who had consumed his paternal inheritance and had run into debt in a thousand disreputable ways; he was now hunting for a new method of obtaining money.

"He had found this one.

"He was a good-looking lad, well set up, but a rake, one of the loathsome tribe of provincial rakes. He seemed to give promise of being an adequate husband, and one that an allowance would easily remove again.

"He came to the house to press his suit and show himself off before the beautiful idiot, whom he seemed to like. He brought her flowers, kissed her hands, sat at her feet and gazed at her with tender eyes; but she took no notice of any of his attentions, and in no way distinguished him from any of the people among whom she lived.

"The marriage took place.

"You will understand to what a degree my curiosity was inflamed.

"The next day I went to see Berthe, to judge from her face whether any inner part of her had been stirred. But I found her just the same as on other days, solely preoccupied with the clock and dinner. Her husband, on the contrary, seemed very fond of her, and tried to rouse her gaiety and affection by little teasing games such as one plays with kittens.

"He had found nothing better.

"I then started to pay frequent visits to the newly-married couple, and I soon perceived that the young woman recognised her husband and directed upon him the greedy looks which hitherto she had lavished only upon sweet things to eat.

"She followed his movements, distinguished his step on the stairs, or in a neighbouring room, clapped her hands when he came in, and her transfigured countenance burned with a flame of profound happiness and desire.

"She loved him with all her body, with all her soul, her poor feeble soul, with all her heart, the poor heart of a grateful animal.

"She was truly an admirable innocent picture of simple passion, of passion at once carnal and modest, such as nature had set in human beings before man complicated and distorted it with all the subtleties of sentiment.

"As for the man, he quickly wearied of the beautiful, passionate, dumb creature. He no longer spent more than a few hours of each day with her, finding it enough to devote his nights to her.

"And she began to suffer.

"From morning to night she waited for him, her eyes fixed on the clock, not even paying attention to meals, for he always went away for his meals, to Clermont, Châtel-Guyon, Royat, anywhere so as not to be at home.

"She grew thin.

"Every other thought, every other desire, every other interest, every other vague hope, vanished from her mind; the hours in which she did not see him became for her hours of terrible torment. Soon he began to sleep away from her. He spent his nights at the Casino at Royat with women, coming home early at the first gleam of day.

"She refused to go to bed before he returned. She stayed motionless on a chair, her eyes vaguely fixed on the little brass hands which turned round and round in slow, regular progress, round the china dial wherein the hours were inscribed.

"She heard the distant trotting of his horse, and would start up with a bound; then, when he came into the room, she would raise her fingers to the clock with a ghostly gesture, as though to say to him: 'Look how late it is!' He began to be afraid in the presence of this loving, jealous idiot; he became possessed of a slow resentment, as an animal might be. One night he struck her.

"I was sent for. She was screaming in a terrible fit of grief, rage, passion; I knew not what. How can one tell what is going on in these rudimentary brains?

"I calmed her with injections of morphine; and I forbade her ever to see the man again, for I realised that the marriage would inevitably end in her death.

"Then she went mad! Yes, my dear fellow, that idiot girl went mad. She thinks of him always, and waits for him. She waits for him all day and all night, every moment, waking or sleeping, perpetually. As I saw her growing thinner and thinner, and as her obstinate gaze never left the faces of the

clocks, I had all these instruments for measuring time removed from the house. Thus I have taken from her the possibility of counting the hours, and of for ever searching her dim memory for the moment at which once upon a time he had been wont to come home. I hope in the long run to kill remembrance in her, to extinguish the spark of reason that I took such trouble to set alight.

"The other day I tried an experiment. I offered her my watch. She took it and studied it for some time; then she began to scream in a terrible way, as though the sight of the little instrument had suddenly reawakened the memory that was beginning to slumber.

"She is thin now, pitifully thin, with shining, hollow eyes. She walks up and down unceasingly, like a caged beast.

"I have had two bars put on the windows, have put up high screens, and have fixed the chairs to the floor, to prevent her from looking into the street to see if he is coming back.

"Oh, the poor parents! What a life theirs will have been!"

We had arrived at the top of the hill; the doctor turned round and said to me:

"Look at Riom from here."

The sombre town wore the aspect of an ancient walled city. In the background, as far as the eye could reach, stretched a green, wooded plain, dotted with villages and towns, and drowned in a thin blue vapour which made the horizon a delight to the eyes. On the right, in the distance, was a line of high mountains with a succession of peaks, rounded or cut sharply as with a sword-cut.

The doctor began to enumerate the places and peaks, telling me the history of each.

But I did not listen to him; I thought only of the mad-woman, saw nothing but her. She seemed to hover like a melancholy ghost over all this wide country.

"What has become of the husband?" I asked abruptly.

My friend, somewhat surprised, answered after a pause:

"He's living at Royat on the allowance made to him. He's happy ; he leads a gay life."

As we were walking slowly homewards, both of us saddened and silent, an English dog-cart passed us from behind, a fast-trotting thoroughbred in the shafts.

The doctor gripped my arm.

"There he is," he said.

I saw nothing but a grey felt hat, tilted over one ear, above a pair of broad shoulders, disappearing in a cloud of dust.

MISTI

RECOLLECTIONS OF A BACHELOR

MY MISTRESS AT THAT TIME WAS A FUNNY LITTLE WOMAN. She was married, of course, for I've a perfect horror of unmarried women. After all, what pleasure can one have in possessing a woman who has the double disadvantage of belonging to no one and belonging to every one? And honestly, quite apart from the moral side of the question, I can't understand love as a profession. It rather disgusts me. It's a weakness, I know, and I confess it.

The chief pleasure a bachelor gets out of having a married woman for his mistress, is that she provides him with a home, a comfortable, pleasant home in which every one looks after him and spoils him, from the husband to the servants. Every pleasure is there united, love, friendship, even fatherhood, the bed and the table, in fact all that makes up the happiness of life, together with the incalculable advantage of being able to change your household from time to time, of installing yourself by turns in every sphere, in the country, during the summer, in the home of workman who lets you a room in his house; in the winter, with the middle classes, or even with the aristocracy, if you are ambitious.

I have another weakness: I like my mistresses' husbands. I admit that there are husbands, vulgar or coarse, who fill me with disgust for their wives, however charming these may be. But when the husband has wit or charm, I fall inevitably desperately in love. I am careful, if I break with the woman, not to break with the husband. In this way I have made my

best friends, and in this manner I have oft-times verified the incontestable superiority of the male over the female of the human species. The latter causes you every possible worry, makes scenes, reproaches you, and so forth; the former, who has quite as much right to complain, treats you, on the contrary, as though you were the good angel of his home.

Well, my mistress was a funny little woman, dark, fantastic, capricious, religious, superstitious, credulous as a monk, but charming. Above all, she had a way of kissing which I have never found in another woman . . . but this is not the place. . . . And such a soft skin! I derived infinite pleasure merely from holding her hand! And her eyes. . . . Her gaze passed over you like a slow caress, delicious and endless. Often I laid my head on her knees, and we remained motionless, she bending over me with that faint, enigmatic, disturbing little smile that women have, I lifting my eyes towards her, receiving like wine poured gently and deliciously into my heart, the shining gaze of her blue eyes, bright as though filled with thoughts of love, blue like a heaven of delights.

Her husband, a civil servant, was often away, leaving our evenings free. Often I spent them at her house, lying on the divan, my forehead pressed against one of her legs, while upon the other slept a huge black cat named "Misti," which she adored. Our fingers met on the animal's muscular back, and caressed one another amid its silky hair. I felt against my cheek its warm flank, throbbing with a perpetual "purr-purr." Sometimes it would stretch out a paw to my mouth, or set five unsheathed claws upon my eyelids, whose points pricked my eyes and withdrew in a flash.

Sometimes we went out on what she called our escapades. As a matter of fact they were very innocent. They consisted in supping at an outlying inn, or else, after we had dined at her house or mine, of visiting low taverns, like students on the spree.

We went to the lowest drinking-places and sat down at the

far end of smoky dens, on rickety chairs, at an old wooden table. A cloud of acrid smoke, which smelled still of the fried fish eaten at dinner, filled the room; men in blouses talked noisily and drank brandy; and the astonished waiter served us cherry brandies.

Trembling with delicious terror, she would raise her little black veil, folded double, to the tip of her nose, where it rested, and begin to drink with the pleasure of committing a delightful crime. Each cherry she swallowed gave her the sense of a sin committed, each sip of the coarse liquor ran down her throat like a delicate, forbidden pleasure.

Then she would say to me in a low voice: "Let us go." And we left. She went out quickly, her head lowered, with short steps, between the drinkers who watched her pass with resentful glances; and when we found ourselves out in the street again, she would utter a deep sigh as though we had just escaped from dreadful peril.

Sometimes she asked me with a shudder: "If I were insulted in one of these places, what would you do?" And I would reply in a swaggering tone: "Why, defend you, damn it." And she would squeeze my arm in her happiness, with a vague wish, perhaps, to be insulted and defended, to see men, even men like that, fight me for her.

One evening, as we were seated at a table in a Montmartre den, we saw a ragged old woman come in, holding in her hand a greasy pack of cards. Observing a lady, the old woman promptly came up to us, offering to tell my companion's fortune. Emma, whose mind believed anything and everything, shivered with pleasure and uneasiness, and made room beside her for the hag.

The ancient, wrinkled woman, with rings of raw flesh round her eyes and an empty, toothless mouth, set out her dirty cards on the table. She made them into heaps, picked them up, and set them out again, muttering inaudible words. Emma

listened, pale, breathing quickly, panting with distress and curiosity.

The witch began to speak; she made vague predictions: happiness and children, a fair young man, a journey, money, a lawsuit, a dark gentleman, the return of a friend, a success, a death. The announcement of this death struck the young woman. Whose death? When? How?

"As to that," replied the old woman, "the cards are not strong enough; you must come and see me to-morrow. I'll tell you with the coffee-mark, which never fails."

Emma turned anxiously to me.

"We may go to-morrow, mayn't we? Oh, please say yes! If not, you don't know how it will torment me."

I began to laugh.

"We'll go if you want to, darling."

The old woman gave us her address.

She lived on the sixth floor of an awful house behind the Buttes-Chaumont. We went there the next day.

Her room, a garret with two chairs and a bed, was full of strange things—bunches of herbs hanging from nails, dried animals, bottles and phials containing various coloured liquids. On the table a stuffed black cat stared with glass eyes. He looked like the familiar spirit of this sinister dwelling.

Emma, faint with excitement, sat down, and said at once:

"Oh, darling, look at the cat! Isn't he just like Misti?"

And she explained to the old woman that she herself had a cat just like that one; oh, exactly like it.

"If you love a man," replied the witch solemnly, "you must not keep it."

"Why not?" asked Emma, struck with terror.

The old woman sat down beside her in a familiar way, and took her hand.

"It's the sorrow of my life," she said.

My friend was eager to hear. She pressed the old woman to tell her, questioned her, urged her: the superstitious credulity

they shared made them sisters in mind and heart. At last the woman made up her mind.

"I loved that cat," she said, "like a brother. I was young in those days, and all alone; I did sewing at home. Monton was all I had. A lodger gave him to me. He was as clever as a child, and gentle too; he idolised me, dear lady, he idolised me more than a fetish. All day long he purred in my lap, all night on my pillow; I felt his heart beat, I did.

"Well, I made friends with a man, a nice boy who worked at a linen-draper's. It went on for three months without my granting him anything. But you know how it is, one weakens—it happens to everybody; and besides, I had begun to love him, that I had. He was so nice, so nice and kind. He wanted us to live together all the time, for economy. At last I let him come and see me one evening. I hadn't made up my mind, oh, dear, no! but I liked the idea of being together for an hour.

"At the beginning he was very well behaved. He said pretty things to me which stirred my heart. Then he kissed me, Madame, gave me a lover's kiss. I had shut my eyes and remained in a sort of paralysis of happiness. Suddenly I felt that he'd made a violent movement, and he screamed, a scream I shall never forget. I opened my eyes and saw that Monton had flown at his face and was tearing his skin with his claws, like a rag of linen. And the blood was streaming down, Madame.

"I tried to pull the cat off, but he held tight, and went on scratching, and even bit me, he was so far out of his senses. At last I got hold of him and threw him out of the window, which was open, since it was summer.

"When I began to wash my poor friend's face, I saw that he had lost his eyes, both eyes.

"He had to go to the hospital. He died of agony a year after. I wanted to have him with me and feed him, but he would not. He seemed to hate me after it had happened.

"As for Monton, he broke his back in the fall. The porter

had picked up the body. I had him stuffed, since I still felt attached to him. If he had done that, it was because he loved me, wasn't it?"

The old woman was silent, and stroked the dead beast with her hand; the carcass shook on its wire skeleton.

Emma, her heart wrung, had forgotten the predicted death. At any rate, she said nothing more about it, and went away after giving the woman five francs.

Her husband came back the next day, and so several days passed before I saw her.

When I visited her again, I was surprised not to see Misti. I asked where he was.

She blushed, and replied:

"I gave him away. I wasn't happy about him."

I was surprised.

"Not happy? Not happy? What about?"

She gave me a long kiss, and murmured in a low voice:

"I was afraid for your eyes, darling."

OLD BONIFACE'S CRIME

AS BONIFACE THE POSTMAN LEFT THE POST OFFICE HE DISCOVERED that his round that day would not take as long as usual, and felt a sharp pleasure in the knowledge. His task was the rural delivery outside the town of Vireville, and when he returned at night, with long, weary strides, his legs had often more than forty kilometres behind them.

So his delivery would be quickly done! He could even loiter a little on the way and get home about three in the afternoon. What luck!

He left the town by the Sennemare road and began his duties. It was June, the green and flowery month, the month when meadows look their best.

Dressed in a blue blouse, and wearing a black cap with red braid, the postman took the narrow paths across fields of colza, oats, or wheat. The crops were shoulder-high, and his head, passing along above the ears, appeared to float on a calm green sea rippled gently by a little wind.

He entered the farms through wooden gates set in the hedgerows shaded by double rows of beeches, and greeting the peasant by name: "Good morning, Monsieur Chicot," he would offer him his paper, the *Petit Normand*. The farmer would wipe his hand on the seat of his breeches, take the sheet of paper, and slip it into his pocket to read at his leisure after the midday meal. The dog, kennelled in a barrel, at the foot of a leaning apple-tree, would bark furiously and tug at his chain, and the postman, without turning round, would set off again with his military gait, his long legs taking great strides, his left hand in his sack, his right swinging with a quick, ceaseless gesture the stick that kept him company on his round.

He delivered his letters and circulars at the hamlet of Senne-mare, and then went on across the fields to deliver his mail to the tax-collector, who lived in a little house half a mile from the village.

He was a new collector, one Monsieur Chapatis, who had arrived the previous week and was but recently married.

He took in a Paris paper, and sometimes postman Boniface, when he had the time to spare, would glance at it before handing it over to its destined owner.

Accordingly he opened his sack, took out the newspaper, slipped off the band, unfolded it, and began to read it as he walked. The first page was of no interest to him; politics left him cold; he never looked at the financial news, but the news items enthralled him.

They were particular that day. He was so strongly affected by the story of a crime committed in a gamekeeper's cottage that he stopped in the middle of a clover-patch to re-read it slowly. The details were appalling. A wood-cutter, passing the keeper's cottage one morning, noticed a little blood on the door-step, as though someone's nose had been bleeding. "He killed a rabbit last night," thought the wood-cutter, but, drawing nearer, he observed that the door was ajar and the lock smashed.

Then, seized with terror, he ran to the village to inform the mayor; the latter brought with him the constable and the schoolmaster as reinforcements, and the four men went back together. They found the keeper lying in front of the fire-place with his throat cut, his wife under the bed, strangled, and their little six-year-old daughter suffocated between two mattresses.

Boniface the postman was so deeply affected at the thought of this murder, the horrible details of which came home to him one by one, that he felt a weakness in his legs, and said out loud:

"Good Lord, there *are* some villains in this world!"

Then he slipped the journal back into its paper belt and set off again, his head full of visions of the crime. Soon he reached Monsieur Chapatis' dwelling; he opened the gate of the little garden and approached the house. It was a low building, consisting merely of a ground-floor surmounted by a mansard roof. It was at least five hundred yards from the nearest neighbour's.

The postman mounted the two steps up to the entrance, set his hand to the knob, attempted to open the door, and found it locked. Then he saw that the shutters had not been opened, and that no one had left the house that day.

He felt uneasy, for ever since his arrival Monsieur Chapatis had been in the habit of rising early. Boniface pulled out his watch. It was only ten past seven, so that he was nearly an hour ahead of his usual time. Still the tax-collector should have been up and about.

So he went round the building, walking with circumspection, as though he were in danger. He observed nothing suspicious, except a man's footprints in a strawberry-bed.

But suddenly he paused, motionless, transfixed with horror, as he passed in front of a window. Groans were coming from inside the house.

He went towards it and, straddling across a border of thyme, set his ear to the shutter to hear the better; the sound of groans was unmistakable. He could hear plainly long sighs of pain, something like a death-rattle, the sound of a struggle. Then the groans became louder and more frequent, grew even more frenzied, and became screams.

Boniface, no longer in any doubt that a crime was being committed at that very moment in the tax-collector's house, rushed off as fast as his legs could carry him. He fled back through the little garden and dashed across the meadows and cornfields. He ran breathlessly, shaking his sack so that it banged against his back, and arrived, exhausted, panting, and desperate, at the door of the police station.

Inspector Malautour was mending a broken chair with tin-tacks and a hammer. Constable Rantieux was gripping the broken piece of furniture between his legs and holding a nail at the edge of the break; the inspector, chewing his moustache, his eyes round and moist with concentration, hit his subordinate's fingers at every stroke.

As soon as he saw them the postman cried out :

"Come quick, somebody's murdering the tax-collector! Come quick, quick!"

The two men ceased their work and looked up, with the dumbfounded air of men suddenly and amazingly interrupted.

Boniface, seeing that their surprise was greater than their haste, said again :

"Quick! Quick! Thieves are in the house, I heard screams, there's barely time!"

The inspector set down his hammer and asked :

"Who was it who informed you of this deed?"

The postman replied :

"I was going to deliver the paper and two letters when I noticed that the door was shut and that the tax-collector had not yet got up. I walked round the house to try and find out the reason, and heard someone groaning as though he were being strangled or had had his throat cut, so I came away to fetch you as fast as I could go. There's barely time."

The inspector drew himself up to his full height and said :

"You did not render assistance in person?"

"I was afraid that I was not present in sufficient strength," replied the frightened postman.

At that the police official was convinced, and said :

"A moment, while I put my coat on, and I'll follow you."

He went into the police station, followed by his subordinate carrying back the chair.

They reappeared almost immediately and all three set off with vigorous strides for the scene of the crime.

Arriving near the house, they carefully slowed their pace,

and the inspector drew his revolver. Very softly they penetrated into the garden and approached the wall of the house. There were no new signs indicating that the malefactors had departed. The door was still shut, the windows still closed.

"We've got them," murmured the inspector.

Old Boniface, quivering with excitement, made him go round to the side and, pointing to a shuttered window, said :

"It's in there."

The inspector went forward alone, and set his ear to the boards. The two others waited, ready for anything, their eyes fixed upon him.

For a long time he remained motionless, listening. In order to apply his ear closer to the wooden shutter, he had taken off his cocked hat and was holding it in his right hand.

What was he hearing? His impassive face revealed nothing, but suddenly the tips of his moustache turned up, his cheeks were creased as though in silent laughter, and once more straddling across the box-tree border, he came back towards the two men, who stared at him amazed.

Then he signed to them to follow him on tiptoe and, having reached the entrance, bade Boniface slip the paper and letters under the door.

The postman, dumbfounded, obeyed meekly.

"And now off we go," said the inspector.

But as soon as they had passed through the gate, he turned to Boniface, showed the whites of his eyes, gleaming with merriment, and spoke in a bantering tone, with a knowing flicker of his eyelids :

"You're a sly dog, you are."

"What do you mean?" replied the old man. "I heard it, I swear I heard it."

But the policeman, unable to restrain himself any longer, burst into a roar of laughter. He laughed as if he would choke, bent double, his hands across his belly, his eyes filled with tears,

the flesh on each side of his nose distorted into a frightful grimace. The two others stared at him in bewilderment.

But as he could neither speak nor stop laughing nor make them understand what was affecting him, he made a gesture, a quite vulgar and scandalous gesture.

As he still failed to make himself understood, he repeated the movement several times, nodding towards the house, still shuttered.

Suddenly his man understood, in his turn, and burst into formidable transports of merriment.

The old man stood stupidly between the other two, who rolled in agonies of mirth.

At last the inspector grew calm; he gave the old man a vigorous chaffing poke in the stomach, and exclaimed:

"Ah, you sly dog, you and your jokes! I shan't forget old Boniface's crime in a hurry."

The postman, his large eyes wide open, said once more:

"I swear I heard it."

The inspector began to laugh again. His constable had sat down on the grass at the roadside to have his laugh out in comfort.

"Ah, you heard it, did you? And is that how you murder your wife, eh, you dirty dog?"

"My wife?" He reflected at some length, then replied:

"My wife. . . . Yes, she hollers when I knock her about . . . but if she does, what's a bit of noise, anyway? Was Monsieur Chapatis beating his?"

At that the inspector, in a delirium of mirth, turned him round like a puppet with his hands on his shoulders, and whispered into his ear something at which the postman was struck dumb with amazement.

At last the old man murmured thoughtfully:

"No. . . . Not like that. . . . Not like that. . . . Not a bit like that. . . . Mine doesn't say anything. . . . I'd never

have believed it . . . is it possible? . . . Anyone would have sworn that a murder was taking place."

And filled with shame, confusion, and bewilderment, he went on his way across the fields, while the constable and the inspector, still laughing and shouting pungent barrack jests after him, watched his black cap recede into the distance above the quiet waves of the corn.

ROSE

THE TWO YOUNG WOMEN LOOK AS THOUGH BURIED UNDER A canopy of flowers. They are alone in the huge landau, which is loaded with bouquets like a giant basket. Upon the front seat lie two white satin hampers full of violets from Nice, and on the bearskin which covers their knees is a heap of roses, mimosa, pinks, daisies, tuberose, and orange-blossom, knotted together with silk rosettes, seeming about to crush the two slender bodies. Nothing emerges from this brilliant, perfumed bed but their shoulders, their arms, and a wisp of the upper half of their gowns, one blue, the other lilac.

The coachman's whip is sheathed in anemones, the horses' traces are covered with wallflowers, the spokes of the wheels blossom with mignonette; where the lamps should be hung two enormous round bouquets that look like the two strange eyes of this wheeled and flower-decked animal.

At a rapid trot the landau passes along the Antibes road, preceded, followed, and accompanied by a crowd of other garlanded vehicles, full of women drowning in a sea of violets. For it is the day of the battle of flowers at Cannes.

When they reach the Boulevard de la Foncière, the battle begins. For the whole length of the immense avenue a double row of garlanded carriages runs up and down like an endless ribbon. Flowers are flung from one to another. They pass through the air like bullets, strike the fresh faces, flutter, and fall in the dust, where a crowd of urchins picks them up.

A tight-packed crowd on the pavement is looking on, noisy but well behaved, kept in order by mounted police, who trot arrogantly up and down, forcing back the over-inquisitive, as though to keep the plebeians from mingling with the rich.

The carriages call to one another, exchange greetings, and discharge volleys of roses. A car full of pretty girls dressed as red devils attracts and seduces all eyes. A debonair young man, who looks like a portrait of Henry IV, is throwing with eager gaiety a bouquet held on an elastic string. Before the menace of its impact the women shade their eyes and the men duck their heads, but the graceful weapon, swift and obedient, describes a curve in the air and returns to its master, who promptly flings it at a fresh face.

The two young women empty their arsenal in handfuls, and receive a hail of bouquets; at last, tired by an hour of combat, they order the coachman to follow the Juan Bay road, which runs along the sea.

The sun disappears behind the Esterel, silhouetting on the flaming western sky the black jagged edge of the long mountain. The quiet waters stretch, blue and clear, to the far horizon where they mingle with the sky: the fleet anchored in the middle of the bay looks like a herd of monstrous beasts, motionless upon the water, apocalyptic animals, breast-plated and hump-backed, topped with masts frail as feathers, with eyes that light up at dusk.

The young women, huddled under the protection of the heavy rug, glance languidly about them. At last one of them speaks:

"There are some marvellous evenings, are there not, Margot, when life seems well worth living?"

"Yes, it's very lovely," replied the other, "but there is something missing, all the same."

"What! I feel perfectly happy; there's nothing I want."

"Yes, but there is. You are overlooking it now. However profound the delight which overmasters our bodies, we demand always one thing more . . . for our hearts."

"To love a little?" said the other, smiling.

"Yes."

They fell into silence, looked straight ahead ; then she who was called Marguerite murmured :

" Without love, life seems to me insupportable. I need to be loved, were it only by a dog. We are all like that, whatever you may say, Simone."

" No, my dear. I would rather not be loved at all than by just anyone. Do you think I should enjoy being loved, for instance, by . . . by. . . ."

She searched her mind for someone by whom she might be loved, and her eyes roved over the wide landscape. After raking the horizon, her glance fell upon the two metal buttons gleaming on the coachman's back, and with a laugh she continued : " by my coachman ? "

Madame Margot smiled faintly and said in a low voice :

" I assure you it's very good fun to have one of your servants in love with you. It's happened to me two or three times. They roll their eyes so comically that I could die of laughter. Of course, the more loving they are, the more severe you become, until some day you dismiss them on the first excuse that comes into your head, because you'd look so ridiculous if anyone noticed what was going on."

Madame Simone listened with her eyes looking straight in front of her, then declared :

" No, my footman's heart is really not good enough for me. But tell me how you discovered that they were in love with you."

" Why, just as I do with any other man ; when they grew stupid."

" Well, I don't think my lovers look so stupid."

" Why, they're idiots, my dear, unable to speak, answer, or understand anything at all."

" But what did you feel like when a servant fell in love with you ? Were you affected, flattered . . . what ? "

" Affected ? No. Flattered ? Yes, a little. One is always flattered by the love of a man, whoever he may be."

"Really, Margot!"

"It's quite true, my dear. I'll tell you a strange thing which happened to me. You will see how queer and contradictory one's feelings are in such circumstances.

"Four years ago next autumn I found myself without a maid. I had tried five or six hopeless creatures one after another, and was about despairing of ever finding one, when I read, in the advertisement columns of a paper, that a young girl with knowledge of sewing, embroidery, and hairdressing was looking for a place and that she could supply excellent references. Also, she spoke English.

"I wrote to the address indicated, and next day the person in question came to see me. She was fairly tall, slender, and rather pale, with a very timid bearing. She had beautiful black eyes, a charming complexion, and I was attracted to her at once. I asked her for her references; she gave me one in English, for she had just left, she said, the service of Lady Rymwell, with whom she had been ten years.

"The letter stated that the girl had left of her own free will in order to go back to France, and that her mistress had found nothing to reproach her with, during her long service, except some slight indications of 'French coquetry.'

"The puritanical flavour of the English phrase made me smile, and I engaged her at once as my maid. She began her duties the same day; her name was Rose.

"By the end of a month I adored her.

"She was a magnificent find, a pearl, a marvel.

"Her taste in hairdressing was perfect; she could trim a hat better than the best shops, and was a dressmaker into the bargain.

"I was amazed at her ability. Never had I had such a maid.

"She dressed me rapidly, and her hands were uncommonly light. I never felt her fingers on my skin, and there is nothing I dislike so much as the touch of a servant's hand. I grew more

and more indolent, it was such a pleasure to be dressed from head to foot, from chemise to gloves, by this tall, timid girl, whose cheeks always wore a faint blush, and who never spoke. After my bath she used to rub me and massage me while I dozed on my sofa ; upon my word, I thought of her as a friend of humble rank rather than as a mere servant.

" One morning the porter came with an air of mystery, and asked to speak to me. I was surprised, and told him to come in. He was a very steady man, an old soldier who had been my husband's orderly.

" He seemed embarrassed by what he had to tell, and at last faltered :

" ' Madame, the district inspector of police is in the hall.'

" ' What does he want ? ' I asked sharply.

" ' He wants to search the house.'

" The police are a useful body, but I loathe them. I don't think it's a noble profession. Irritated and disturbed, I replied :

" ' Why this search ? What is it for ? I won't have them in.'

" ' He says there is a criminal here,' replied the porter.

" This time I was frightened, and told him to send up the inspector to explain. He was a fairly well-bred man, decorated with the Legion of Honour. He made excuses and begged my pardon, and eventually announced that one of my servants was a convict !

" I was thoroughly annoyed ; I replied that I would vouch for the entire staff of the house, and went through them one after another.

" ' The porter, Pierre Courtin, an old soldier.'

" ' That's not the man.'

" ' The coachman, François Pingau, a peasant from Champagne, the son of one of the farmers on my father's estate.'

" ' Not the man.'

" 'A stable-boy, also from Champagne, the son of some peasants with whom I am acquainted; and the footman you have just seen.'

" 'That's not he.'

" 'Then, Monsieur, it must be clear to you that you have made a mistake.'

" 'Excuse me, Madame, but I am quite sure that there is no mistake on my part. As the person in question is a dangerous criminal will you have the goodness to have all your servants brought here before you and me?'

" 'I refused at first, but at last I gave way, and made them all come up, men and women.'

" 'The inspector cast but a single glance at them, and declared :

" 'That is not all.'

" 'I am sorry, Monsieur; the only one missing is my own maid, a girl whom you could not possibly mistake for a convict.'

" 'May I see her too?' he asked.

" 'Certainly.'

" 'I rang for Rose, who promptly appeared. She had scarcely entered the room when the inspector made a sign, and two men whom I had not seen, hidden behind the door, flung themselves upon her, seized her hands, and bound them with cords.'

" 'A cry of rage escaped me, and I was ready on the instant to run to her defence. The inspector stopped me :

" 'This girl, Madame, is a man named Jean-Nicolas Lecapet, condemned to death in 1879 for murder preceded by rape. His sentence was commuted to imprisonment for life. Four months ago he escaped. We have been searching for him ever since.'

" 'I was bewildered, thunderstruck. I could not believe it. With a laugh the inspector continued :

" 'I can give you only one proof. His right arm is tattooed.'

"The sleeve was rolled up. It was true. The police officer added, rather tactlessly :

" ' You will have to trust *us* to verify the remaining details.' "

" And they led my maid away !

" Now—would you believe it ?—the feeling strongest in me was not anger at the way I had been tricked, duped, and made ridiculous ; it was not the shame of having been dressed and undressed, handled and touched, by that man . . . but a . . . profound humiliation . . . the womanly humiliation. Do you understand ? "

" No, not quite."

" Oh, think. . . . That fellow had been sentenced . . . for rape. . . . I thought, don't you know . . . of the woman he had ravished . . . and it . . . it humiliated me. . . . Now do you understand ? "

Madame Margot did not speak. She gazed straight in front of her with a queer, absent stare, at the two gleaming buttons of the coachman's livery, her lips curved in the inscrutable smile a woman sometimes wears.

THAT PIG, MORIN

I

"LOOK HERE," I SAID TO LABARBE, "YOU HAVE AGAIN repeated those words, 'That pig, Morin.' Why on earth do I never hear Morin's name mentioned without his being called *a pig?*"

Labarbe, who has since become a Deputy, blinked at me like an owl and said: "Do you mean to say that you do not know Morin's story, and yet you come from La Rochelle?" I confessed that I did not know Morin's story, and then Labarbe rubbed his hands, and began his narrative.

"You knew Morin, did you not, and you remember his large drapery shop on the Quai de la Rochelle?"

"Yes, perfectly."

"Well, you must know that in 1862 or '63 Morin went to spend a fortnight in Paris for pleasure, or for his pleasures, but under the pretext of renewing his stock, and you also know what a fortnight in Paris means for a country shopkeeper; it fires his blood. The theatre every evening, women brushing up against you, and a continual state of mental excitement; it drives one mad. One sees nothing but dancers in tights, actresses in very low dresses, round legs, plump shoulders, all nearly within reach of one's hands, without daring or being able to touch them. It is rare for one to have even an affair or two with the commoner sort. And one leaves with heart still a-flutter, and a mind still exhilarated by a sort of longing for kisses which tickle one's lips.

"Morin was in that state when he took his ticket for La Rochelle by the 8.40 night express. Full of regrets and long-

ings he was walking up and down the big waiting-room at the station, when he suddenly came to a halt in front of a young lady who was kissing an old one. She had her veil up, and Morin murmured with delight: 'By Jove, what a beautiful woman!'

"When she had said 'Good-bye' to the old lady, she went into the waiting-room, and Morin followed her; then she went on to the platform and Morin still followed her; then she got into an empty carriage, and he again followed her. There were very few travellers by the express, the engine whistled, and the train started. They were alone. Morin devoured her with his eyes. She appeared to be about nineteen or twenty, and was fair, tall, and had an emancipated air. She wrapped a travelling-rug round her legs and stretched herself on the seat to sleep.

"Morin wondered who she was. And a thousand conjectures, a thousand projects went through his mind. He said to himself: 'So many stories are told of adventures on railway journeys, maybe I am going to have one. Who knows? An affair of this kind can take place so quickly. Perhaps all that I need is a little courage. Was it not Danton who said: "Audacity, more audacity, and always audacity"? If it was not Danton, it was Mirabeau. Anyhow, what does that matter? But then, I am lacking in courage, and that is the difficulty. Oh! if one only knew, if one could only read people's minds! I will bet that every day one misses magnificent opportunities without knowing it. The slightest sign would be enough to let me know that she is perfectly agreeable. . . .'

"Then he imagined combinations which led him to triumph. He pictured some chivalrous deed, or merely some slight service which he rendered her, a lively, gallant conversation which ended in a declaration, which ended in—in what you can guess.

"But he could find no opening; he had no pretext, and he waited for some fortunate circumstance, with his heart wildly beating, and his mind topsy-turvy. The night passed, and the

pretty girl still slept, while Morin was meditating her downfall. The day broke and soon the first ray of sunlight appeared in the sky, a long, clear ray which shone on the face of the sleeping girl, and woke her, so she sat up, looked at the country, then at Morin, and smiled. She smiled like a happy woman, with an engaging and bright look, and Morin trembled. Obviously that smile was intended for him, it was a discreet invitation, the signal which he was waiting for. That smile meant: 'How stupid, what a ninny, what a dolt, what a donkey you are, to have sat there on your seat like a stick all night.'

" 'Just look at me. Am I not charming? And you have sat like that for a whole night, alone with a pretty woman, without venturing to do anything, you great booby!'

" She was still smiling as she looked at him; she even began to laugh; and he was losing his head trying to find something suitable to say, no matter what. But he could think of nothing, nothing, and then, arming himself with Dutch courage, he said to himself: 'It can't be helped, I will risk everything,' and suddenly without the slightest warning, he moved towards her, his arms extended, his lips protruding, and seizing her in his arms, kissed her.

" She sprang up with a bound, shouting: 'Help! help!' and screaming with terror; then she opened the carriage door, and waved her arm outside, mad with fear and trying to jump out, while Morin, who was almost distracted, and feeling sure that she would throw herself out, held her by her skirt and stammered: 'Oh! Madame! Oh! Madame!'

" The train slackened speed, and then stopped. Two guards rushed up at the young woman's frantic signals, and she threw herself into their arms, stammering: 'That man tried—tried—to—to——'

" And then she fainted.

" They were at Mauzé Station, and the gendarme on duty arrested Morin. When the victim of his brutality had regained her consciousness, she made her charge against him, and the

police drew it up. The poor draper did not reach home till night, with a prosecution hanging over him for an outrage on morals in a public place.

II

"At that time I was editor-in-chief of the *Fanal des Charentes*, and I used to meet Morin every day at the Café du Commerce. The day after his adventure he came to see me, as he did not know what to do. I did not conceal my opinion from him. 'You are no better than a pig. No decent man behaves like that.'

"He wept. His wife had given him a beating, and he foresaw his trade ruined, his name dragged through the mire and dishonoured, his friends outraged and cutting him in the street. In the end he excited my pity, and I sent for my colleague Rivet, a bantering but very sensible little man, to give us his advice.

"He advised me to see the Public Prosecutor, who was a friend of mine, and so I sent Morin home, and went to call on the magistrate. He told me that the woman who had been insulted was a young lady, Mademoiselle Henriette Bonnel, who had just received her certificate as a teacher in Paris, and who, being an orphan, spent her holidays with her uncle and aunt, who were very respectable lower middle-class people in Mauzé. What made Morin's case all the more serious was, that the uncle had lodged a complaint. But the public official consented to let the matter drop if this complaint were withdrawn, so that we must try and get him to do this.

"I went back to Morin's and found him in bed, ill with excitement and distress. His wife, a tall, raw-boned woman with a beard, was abusing him continually, and she showed me into the room, shouting at me: 'So you have come to see that pig, Morin. Well, there he is, the beauty!' And she planted

herself in front of the bed, with her hands on her hips. I told him how matters stood, and he begged me to go and see her uncle and aunt. It was a delicate mission, but I undertook it, and the poor devil never ceased repeating : ' I assure you I did not even kiss her, no, not even that. I will take my oath on it ! '

" I replied : ' It doesn't matter ; you are nothing but a pig.' And I took a thousand francs which he gave me, to employ them as I thought best, but as I did not care to venture to the house of her relations alone, I begged Rivet to go with me, which he agreed to do, on condition that we should go there at once, for he had some urgent business at La Rochelle the following afternoon. So two hours later we rang at the door of a nice country-house. A beautiful girl came and opened the door to us, who was assuredly the young lady in question, and I said to Rivet in a low voice : ' Confound it ! I begin to understand Morin ! '

" The uncle, Monsieur Tonnelet, was, as it happened, a subscriber to the *Fanal*, and was a fervent political co-religionist of ours. He received us with open arms, and congratulated us and wished us joy ; he was delighted at having the two editors of his favourite newspaper in his house, and Rivet whispered to me : ' I think we shall be able to arrange the affair of that pig, Morin.'

" The niece had left the room, and I introduced the delicate subject. I invoked the spectre of scandal before his eyes ; I emphasised the inevitable loss of esteem which the young lady would suffer if such an affair became known, for nobody would believe in a simple kiss. The good man seemed undecided, but could not make up his mind about anything without his wife, who would not be in until late that evening. But suddenly he uttered an exclamation of triumph : ' Look here, I have an excellent idea. I shall not let you leave now that you are here. You can both dine here and spend the night, and when my wife comes home, I hope we shall be able to arrange matters.'

"Rivet resisted at first, but the wish to extricate that pig, Morin, decided him, and we accepted the invitation. So the uncle got up delighted, called his niece, and proposed that we should take a stroll in his grounds, saying: 'We will leave serious matters until to-night.' Rivet and he began to talk politics, and I soon found myself lagging a little behind with the girl, who was really charming! charming! and with infinite precautions I began to speak to her about her adventure, and to try to make her my ally. She did not, however, appear in the least confused, and listened to me with an air of great amusement.

"I said to her: 'Just think, Mademoiselle, how unpleasant it will be for you. You will have to appear in court, to encounter malicious glances, to speak before everybody, and to relate in public that unfortunate occurrence in the railway-carriage. Do you not think, between ourselves, that it would have been much better for you to have put that dirty scoundrel in his place without calling assistance, and merely to have changed your carriage?'

"She began to laugh, and replied: 'What you say is quite true! but what could I do? I was frightened, and when one is frightened, one does not stop to reason with oneself. As soon as I realised the situation, I was very sorry that I had called out, but then it was too late. You must also remember that the idiot threw himself upon me like a madman, without saying a word and looking like a lunatic. I did not even know what he wanted of me.'

"She looked me full in the face, without being nervous or intimidated, and I said to myself: 'She is a girl with her wits about her: I can quite see how that pig, Morin, came to make a mistake,' and I went on, jokingly: 'Come, Mademoiselle, confess that he was excusable, for after all, a man cannot find himself opposite such a pretty girl as you are, without feeling a legitimate desire to kiss her.'

"She laughed more than ever, and showed her teeth, and

said : ' Between the desire and the act, Monsieur, there is room for respect.' It was a curious expression to use, although not very clear. Abruptly I asked : ' Well now, supposing I were to kiss you now, what would you do ? ' She stopped, looked at me up and down, and then said calmly : ' Oh ! you ? That is quite another matter.'

" I knew perfectly well, by Jove, that it was not the same thing at all, as everybody in the neighbourhood called me ' Handsome Labarbe.' I was thirty years old in those days, but I asked her : ' And why, pray ? '

" She shrugged her shoulders, and replied : ' Well ! because you are not so stupid as he is.' And then she added, with a sidelong glance : ' Nor so ugly, either.'

" Before she could make a movement to avoid me, I had planted a hearty kiss on her cheek. She sprang aside, but it was too late, and then she said : ' Well, you are not very bashful, either ! But don't do that sort of thing again.'

" I put on a humble look and said in a low voice : ' Oh ! Mademoiselle, as for me, if I long for one thing more than another, it is to be summoned before a magistrate on the same charge as Morin.'

" ' Why ? ' she asked.

" Looking steadily at her, I replied : ' Because you are one of the most beautiful creatures living ; because it would be an honour and a title to glory for me to have offered you violence, and because people would have said, after seeing you : " Well, Labarbe richly deserves what he has got, but he is a lucky fellow, all the same." '

" She began to laugh heartily again, and said : ' How funny you are ! ' And she had not finished the word *funny*, before I had her in my arms and was showering hungry kisses wherever I could find a place, on her hair, her forehead, her eyes, her mouth occasionally, on her cheeks, in fact, all over her head, some part of which she was obliged to leave exposed, in spite of herself, in order to defend the others. At last she managed

to release herself, blushing and angry. 'You are very ill-mannered, Monsieur,' she said, 'and I am sorry I listened to you.'

"I took her hand in some confusion, and stammered out: 'I beg your pardon, I beg your pardon, Mademoiselle. I have offended you; I have acted like a brute! Do not be angry with me for what I have done. If you knew——'

"I vainly sought for some excuse, and in a few moments she said: 'There is nothing for me to know, Monsieur.' But I had found something to say, and I cried: 'Mademoiselle, I have been in love with you for a whole year!'

"She was really surprised, and raised her eyes to look at me, and I went on: 'Yes, Mademoiselle, listen to me. I do not know Morin, and I do not care anything about him. It does not matter to me in the least if he is committed for trial and locked up meanwhile. I saw you here last year; you were down there at the gate, and I was so taken with you, that the thought of you has never left me since, and it does not matter to me whether you believe me or not. I thought you adorable, and the remembrance of you took such a hold on me that I longed to see you again, and so I made use of that fool, Morin, as a pretext, and here I am. Circumstances have made me exceed the due limits of respect, and I can only beg you to pardon me.'

"She was trying to read the truth in my eyes, and was ready to smile again; then she murmured: 'You humbug!' But I raised my hand, and said in a sincere voice (and I really believe that I was sincere): 'I swear to you that I am speaking the truth.' She replied quite simply: 'Really?'

"We were alone, quite alone, as Rivet and her uncle had disappeared in a side walk, and I made her a real declaration of love, prolonged and gentle, while I squeezed and kissed her fingers, and she listened to it as to something new and agreeable, without exactly knowing how much of it she was to believe, while in the end I felt agitated, and at last really myself believed

what I said. I was pale, anxious, and trembling, and I gently put my arm round her waist, and spoke to her softly, whispering into the little curls over her ears. She seemed dead, so absorbed in thought was she.

"Then her hand touched mine, and she pressed it, and I gently circled her waist with a trembling, and gradually a firmer, grasp. She did not move now, and I touched her cheeks with my lips, and suddenly, without seeking them, mine met hers. It was a long, long kiss, and it would have lasted longer still, if I had not heard 'Ahem, ahem' just behind me. She made her escape through the bushes, and I, turning round, saw Rivet coming toward me. He stopped in the middle of the path and said without even smiling: 'So that is the way in which you settle the affair of that pig, Morin.'

"I replied, conceitedly: 'One does what one can, my dear fellow. But what about the uncle? How have you got on with him? I will answer for the niece.'

"'I have not been so fortunate with him,' he replied. Whereupon I took his arm, and we went indoors.

III

"Dinner made me lose my head altogether. I sat beside her, and my hand continually met hers under the table-cloth, my foot touched hers, and our glances met and melted together.

"After dinner we took a walk by moonlight, and I whispered to her all the tender things that rose in my heart. I held her close to me, embracing her every moment, and pressing my lips against hers. Her uncle and Rivet were arguing as they walked in front of us, their shadows following solemnly behind them on the sandy paths. We went in, and soon a messenger brought a telegram from her aunt, saying that she would not return until the first train the next morning, at seven o'clock.

"'Very well, Henriette,' her uncle said, 'go and show the

gentlemen their rooms.' She showed Rivet his first, and he whispered to me: 'There was no danger of her taking us into yours first.' Then she took me to my room, and as soon as she was alone with me, I took her in my arms again and tried to excite her senses and overcome her resistance, but when she felt that she was near succumbing, she escaped out of the room, and I got between the sheets, very much put out and excited, and feeling rather foolish, for I knew that I should not sleep much. I was wondering what mistakes I could have committed, when there was a gentle knock at my door, and on my asking who was there, a low voice replied: 'I.'

"I dressed myself quickly and opened the door, and she came in. 'I forgot to ask you what you take in the morning,' she said, 'chocolate, tea, or coffee?' I put my arms around her impetuously and said, devouring her with kisses: 'I will take—I will take——' But she freed herself from my arms, blew out my candle, and disappeared, and left me alone in the dark, furious, trying to find some matches and not able to do so. At last I got some and I went into the passage, feeling half mad, with my candlestick in my hand.

"What was I going to do? I did not stop to think, I only wanted to find her, and I would. I went a few steps without reflecting, but then I suddenly thought to myself: 'Suppose I should go into the uncle's room, what should I say?' And I stood still, with my head a void, and my heart beating.

"But in a few moments, I thought of an answer: 'Of course, I shall say that I was looking for Rivet's room, to speak to him about an important matter,' and I began to inspect all the doors, trying to find hers. At random I took hold of a key, turned it, the door opened and I went in. There was Henriette, sitting on her bed and looking at me in terror. So I gently pushed the bolt, and going up to her on tiptoe, I said: 'I forgot to ask you for something to read, Mademoiselle.' She struggled, but I soon opened the book I was looking for. I will not tell you its title, but it is the most wonderful of

romances, the divinest of poems. And when once I had turned the first page, she let me turn over as many leaves as I liked, and I got through so many chapters that our candles were quite burned out.

"Then, after thanking her, I was stealthily returning to my room, when a rough hand seized me, and a voice—it was Rivet's—whispered in my ear: 'Are you still settling the affair of that pig, Morin?'

"At seven o'clock the next morning, she herself brought me a cup of chocolate. I have never drunk anything like it, soft, velvety, perfumed, intoxicating, a chocolate to make one swoon with pleasure. I could scarcely take away my mouth from the delicious lips of her cup. She had hardly left the room when Rivet came in. He seemed nervous and irritable like a man who had not slept, and he said to me crossly: 'If you go on like this, you will end by spoiling the affair of that pig, Morin!'

"At eight o'clock the aunt arrived. Our discussion was very short, the good people withdrew their complaint, and I left five hundred francs for the poor of the town. They wanted to keep us for the day, and they arranged an excursion to go and see some ruins. Henriette made signs to me to stay, behind her uncle's back, and I accepted, but Rivet was determined to go. I took him aside, and begged and prayed him: 'Come on, old man, do it for my sake.' He appeared quite exasperated and kept saying to me: 'I have had enough of that pig Morin's affair, do you hear?'

"Of course I was obliged to go also, and it was one of the hardest moments of my life. I could have gone on settling that business as long as I lived, and when we were in the railway carriage, after shaking hands with her in silence, I said to Rivet: 'You are a mere brute!' And he replied: 'My dear fellow, you were beginning to get on my nerves confoundedly.'

"On getting to the *Fanal* office, I saw a crowd waiting for us, and as soon as they saw us, they all exclaimed: 'Well,

have you settled the affair of that pig, Morin?' All La Rochelle was excited about it, and Rivet, who had got over his ill humour on the journey, had great difficulty in keeping himself from laughing as he said: 'Yes, we have managed it, thanks to Labarbe.' And we went to Morin's.

"He was sitting in an arm-chair, with mustard plasters on his legs, and cold bandages on his head, nearly dead with misery. He was coughing incessantly with the short cough of a dying man, without anyone knowing how he had caught this cold, and his wife seemed like a tigress ready to eat him. As soon as he saw us he trembled so violently as to make his hands and knees shake, so I said to him immediately: 'It is all settled, you dirty scamp, but don't do such a thing again.'

"He got up, choking, took my hands and kissed them as if they had belonged to a prince, cried, nearly fainted, embraced Rivet, and even kissed Madame Morin, who gave him a push that sent him staggering back into his arm-chair. But he never got over the blow: his mind had been too upset. In all the country round, moreover, he was called nothing but 'that pig, Morin,' and the epithet went through him like a sword-thrust every time he heard it. When a street-boy called after him: 'Pig!' he turned his head instinctively. His friends also overwhelmed him with horrible jokes, and used to chaff him, whenever they were eating ham, by saying: 'Is this a bit of you?' He died two years later.

"As for myself, when I was a candidate for the Chamber of Deputies in 1875, I called on the new notary at Tousserre, Monsieur Belloncle, to solicit his vote, and a tall, handsome, richly-dressed woman received me. 'Don't you remember me?' she said.

"I stammered out: 'No . . . No . . . Madame.'

"'Henriette Bonnel?'

"'Ah!' And I felt myself turning pale, while she seemed perfectly at her ease, and looked at me with a smile.

"As soon as she had left me alone with her husband, he took

both of my hands, and squeezing them as if he meant to crush them, he said : ' I have been intending to go and see you for a long time, my dear sir, for my wife has very often talked to me about you. I know under what painful circumstances you made her acquaintance, and I know also how perfectly you behaved, how full of delicacy, tact, and devotion you showed yourself in the affair——' He hesitated, and then said in a lower tone, as if he had been saying something low and coarse : ' In the affair of that pig, Morin.' "

THE SNIPE

FOR FORTY YEARS OLD BARON DES RAVOTS HAD BEEN THE champion sportsman of his province. But a stroke of paralysis had kept him in his chair for the last five or six years. He could now only shoot pigeons from the window of his drawing-room or from the top of the great flight of steps in front of his house. He spent the rest of his time in reading.

He was a good-natured business man, who had much of the literary spirit of the past century. He loved anecdotes, little *risqué* anecdotes, true stories of events that happened in his neighbourhood. As soon as a friend came to see him he would ask :

"Well, anything new?"

And he knew how to cross-examine like a lawyer.

On sunny days he had his large arm-chair, which was like a bed, wheeled to the hall door. A servant behind him held his guns, loaded them and handed them to his master. Another valet, hidden in the bushes, let fly a pigeon from time to time at irregular intervals, so that the baron should be unprepared and be always on the watch.

And from morning till night he fired at the birds, much annoyed if he were taken by surprise and laughing till he cried when the animal fell straight to the earth or turned over in some comical and unexpected manner. He would turn to the man who was loading the gun and say, almost choking with laughter :

"Did that get him, Joseph? Did you see how he fell?" Joseph invariably replied :

"Oh, Monsieur le Baron never misses them."

In autumn, when the shooting season opened, he invited his friends as he had done formerly, and loved to hear them

firing in the distance. He counted the shots and was pleased when they followed each other rapidly. And in the evening he made each guest give a faithful account of his day. They remained three hours at table telling about their sport.

They were strange and improbable adventures, in which the loquacious temper of the sportsmen delighted. Some of them were already historical stories and were repeated regularly. The story of a rabbit that little Vicomte de Bourril had missed in his hall convulsed them with laughter each year anew. Every five minutes a fresh speaker would say :

"I heard 'birr ! birr !' and a magnificent covey rose at ten paces from me. I aimed. Bang ! bang ! and I saw a shower, a veritable shower of birds. There were seven of them !"

And they all went into raptures, amazed, but reciprocally credulous.

But there was an old custom in the house called "The Story of the Snipe."

Whenever this queen of birds was in season the same ceremony took place at each dinner. As they loved this incomparable bird, each guest ate one every evening, but the heads were all left in the dish.

Then the baron, acting the part of a bishop, had a plate brought to him containing a little fat, and he carefully anointed the precious heads, holding them by the tip of their slender, needle-like beaks. A lighted candle was placed beside him and every one was silent in an anxiety of expectation.

Then he took one of the heads thus prepared, stuck a pin through it and stuck the pin on a cork, keeping the whole contrivance steady by means of little crossed sticks, and carefully balanced this object on the neck of a bottle like a sort of turnstile

All the guests counted simultaneously in a loud tone :

"One—two—three."

And the baron with a flip of his finger made this toy whirl round.

The guest at whom the long beak pointed when the head stopped became the possessor of all the heads, a feast for a king, which made his neighbours envious.

He took them one by one and toasted them over the candle. The grease sputtered, the roasting flesh smoked and the lucky winner ate the head, holding it by the beak and uttering exclamations of enjoyment.

And at each head the diners, raising their glasses, drank to his health.

When he had finished the last head he was obliged, at the baron's orders, to tell an anecdote to compensate the disappointed ones.

Here are some of the stories.

THE MAD WOMAN

THAT REMINDS ME OF A TERRIBLE STORY OF THE FRANCO-Prussian war (said Monsieur d'Endolin). You know my house in the Faubourg de Corneil. I was living there when the Prussians came, and I had for a neighbour a kind of mad woman, who had lost her senses in consequence of a series of misfortunes, as at the age of twenty-five she had lost her father, her husband and her newly-born child, all in the space of a month.

When death has once entered a house, it almost invariably returns immediately, as if it knew the way, and the young woman, overwhelmed with grief, took to her bed and was delirious for six weeks. Then, a species of calm lassitude succeeded that violent crisis, and she remained motionless, eating next to nothing, and only moving her eyes. Every time they tried to make her get up, she screamed as if they were about to kill her, and so they ended by leaving her continually in bed; and only taking her out to wash her, to change her linen and to turn her mattress.

An old servant remained with her, who gave her something to drink, or a little cold meat, from time to time. What was happening in that anguished mind? No one ever knew, for she never spoke again. Was she thinking of the dead? Was she dreaming sadly, without any precise recollection of anything that had happened? Or was her stunned memory as still as stagnant water? For fifteen years she remained thus inert and secluded.

The war broke out, and in the beginning of December the Germans came to Corneil. I can remember it as if it were but yesterday. It was freezing hard enough to split the stones, and

I, myself, was lying back in an arm-chair, being unable to move on account of the gout, when I heard their heavy and regular tread ; I could see them pass, from my window.

They marched past interminably, with that wooden motion of a puppet on wires which is peculiar to them. Then the officers billeted their men on the inhabitants, and I had seventeen of them. My neighbour, the mad woman, had a dozen, one of whom was a major, a regular, violent, surly swashbuckler.

During the first few days everything went on swimmingly. The officer next door had been told that the lady was ill, and he did not pay any attention to that in the least. But soon this woman, whom they never saw, irritated him. He asked what her illness was, and was told that she had been in bed for fifteen years, in consequence of terrible grief. No doubt he did not believe it, and thought that the poor mad creature would not leave her bed out of pride, so that she might not come near the Prussians, nor speak to them, nor even see them.

He insisted upon her receiving him, and he was shown into the room, and said to her roughly : " I must beg you to get up, Madame, and to come downstairs so that we may all see you," but she merely turned her vague eyes on him, without replying, and so he continued : " I do not intend to tolerate any insolence, and if you do not get up of your own accord, I can easily find means to make you walk without any assistance."

But she did not give any signs of having heard him, and remained quite motionless, and then he got furious, as he took that calm silence for a mark of supreme contempt, and so he added : " If you do not come downstairs to-morrow. . . ." And then he left the room.

The next day the terrified old servant tried to dress her, but the mad woman began to scream violently, and resisted with all her might. The officer ran upstairs quickly, and the servant threw herself at his feet and cried : " She will not come down, Monsieur, she will not. Forgive her, for she is so unhappy."

The soldier was embarrassed, as in spite of his anger, he did not venture to order his soldiers to drag her out, but suddenly he began to laugh, and gave some orders in German, and soon a party of soldiers was seen coming out supporting a mattress as if they were carrying a wounded man. On that bed, which had not been unmade, the mad woman, who was still silent, was lying quietly, for she was quite indifferent to anything that went on, as long as they let her lie. Behind her, a soldier was carrying a bundle of feminine attire, and the officer said, rubbing his hands: "We will just see whether you cannot dress yourself alone, and take a little walk."

And then the procession went off in the direction of the forest of Imauville; in two hours the soldiers came back alone, and nothing more was seen of the mad woman. What had they done with her? Where had they taken her to? No one ever knew.

The snow was falling day and night, and enveloped the plain and the woods in a shroud of frozen foam, and the wolves came and howled at our very doors.

The thought of that poor lost woman haunted me, and I made several applications to the Prussian authorities in order to obtain some information, and was nearly shot for doing so. When spring returned, the army of occupation withdrew, but my neighbour's house remained closed; the grass grew thick in the garden walks. The old servant had died during the winter, and nobody troubled any longer about that affair; I alone thought about it constantly. What had they done with the woman? Had she escaped through the forest? Had somebody found her, and taken her to a hospital, without being able to obtain any information from her? Nothing happened to relieve my doubts; but, by degrees, time assuaged my anxiety.

Well, in the following autumn the woodcock were very plentiful, and as I had some respite from my gout, I dragged

myself as far as the forest. I had already killed four or five of the long-billed birds, when I knocked over one which fell into a ditch full of branches, and I was obliged to get into it, in order to pick it up, and I found that it had fallen beside a human skull, and immediately the recollection of the mad woman struck me, like a blow in the chest. Many other people had perhaps died in the wood during that disastrous year. I do not know why, yet I was sure, sure, I tell you, that I had stumbled upon the head of that wretched maniac.

And suddenly I understood, I guessed everything. They had abandoned her on that mattress in the cold, deserted wood ; and, faithful to her obsession, she had allowed herself to perish under that thick and light counterpane of snow, without moving an arm or a leg.

Then the wolves had devoured her, and the birds had built their nests with the wool from her torn bed. I took charge of her remains, and I only pray that our sons may never see war again.

THE WILL

I KNEW THAT TALL YOUNG FELLOW, RENÉ DE BOURNEVAL. He was an agreeable companion, though rather melancholy, and disillusioned about everything, very sceptical, with a scepticism which was direct and devastating, and especially skilful in exposing social hypocrisies in a biting phrase. He often used to say :

“ There are no honest men ; at best, they only appear so in comparison with swine.”

He had two brothers, whom he shunned, the Messieurs de Courcils. I thought they were by another father, on account of the difference in the name. I had frequently heard that something strange had happened in the family, but no details were given.

As I took a great liking to him, we soon became intimate, and one evening, when I had been dining with him alone, I asked him by chance : “ Are you by your mother’s first or second marriage ? ” He grew rather pale ; then he flushed, and did not speak for a few moments ; he was visibly embarrassed. Then he smiled in that melancholy and gentle manner peculiar to him, and said :

“ My dear friend, if it will not bore you, I can tell you some very strange details about my life. I know you to be a sensible man, so I am not afraid that our friendship will suffer by my revelations, and if it did, I should not care about having you for my friend any longer.

“ My mother, Madame de Courcils, was a poor, timid, little woman, whom her husband had married for the sake of her fortune. Her whole life was a martyrdom. Of an affectionate, timorous and sensitive nature, she was constantly ill-treated by

the man who ought to have been my father, one of those boors called country gentlemen. A month after their marriage he was living with a servant, and besides that, the wives and daughters of his tenants were his mistresses, which did not prevent him from having two children by his wife, three if you count me. My mother said nothing, and lived in that noisy house like one of those little mice which slip under the furniture. Self-effacing, retiring and nervous, she looked at people with bright, uneasy, restless eyes, the eyes of some terrified creature which can never shake off its fear. And yet she was pretty, very pretty and fair, a grey blonde, as if her hair had lost its colour through her constant fears.

"Among Monsieur de Courcils' friends who constantly came to the château there was an ex-cavalry officer, a widower, a man to be feared, a man at the same time tender and violent, and capable of the most energetic resolution, Monsieur de Bourneval, whose name I bear. He was a tall, thin man, with a heavy black moustache, and I am very like him. He was a man who had read a great deal, and whose ideas were not like those of most of his class. His great-grandmother had been a friend of J. J. Rousseau, and it seemed as if he had inherited something from this connection of his ancestor's. He knew the *Contrat Social* and the *Nouvelle Héloïse* by heart, and, indeed, all those philosophical books which led the way to the overthrow of our old usage, prejudices, superannuated laws, and imbecile morality.

"It seemed that he loved my mother, and she loved him, but their intrigue was carried on so secretly that no one guessed it. The poor, neglected, unhappy woman must have clung to him desperately, and in her intimacy with him must have imbibed all his ways of thinking, theories of free thought, audacious ideas of independent love. But as she was so timid that she never ventured to speak aloud, it was all driven back, condensed, and compressed in her heart, which never opened itself.

"My two brothers were very cruel to her, like their father, and never gave her a caress. Used to seeing her count for nothing in the house, they treated her rather like a servant, and so I was the only one of her sons who really loved her, and whom she loved.

"I was eighteen at the time she died. I must add, in order that you may understand what follows, that a trustee had been appointed to look after my father's affairs, that a decision in favour of my mother had been pronounced, dividing the property they held in common. Thanks to the workings of the law and the intelligent devotion of a lawyer to her interests, she had preserved the right to make her will in favour of any one she pleased.

"We were told that there was a will lying at the lawyer's, and were invited to be present at the reading of it. I can remember it, as if it were yesterday. It was a grand, dramatic, yet burlesque and surprising scene, brought about by the posthumous revolt of the dead woman, by a cry for liberty from the depths of her tomb, on the part of a martyred woman who had been crushed by our customs during her life, and who, from her grave, uttered a despairing appeal for independence.

"The man who thought that he was my father, a stout, ruddy-faced man who looked like a butcher, and my brothers, two great fellows of twenty and twenty-two, were waiting quietly in their chairs. Monsieur de Bourneval, who had been invited to be present, came in and stood behind me. He was very pale, and bit his moustache, which was turning grey. No doubt he was prepared for what was going to happen. The lawyer double-locked the door, and began to read the will, after opening in our presence the envelope, which was sealed with red wax, and whose contents he did not know."

My friend stopped suddenly and got up, and from his writing-table took an old paper, unfolded it, kissed it and continued :

"This is the will of my beloved mother :

“ ‘I, the undersigned, Anne-Catherine-Geneviève-Mathilde de Croixluce, the legitimate wife of Léopold-Joseph Gontran de Courcils, sound in body and mind, here express my last wishes :

“ ‘I first of all ask God, and then my dear son René, to pardon me for the act I am about to commit. I believe that my child’s heart is great enough to understand me, and to forgive me. I have suffered my whole life long. I was married for mercenary reasons, then despised, misunderstood, oppressed, and constantly deceived by my husband.

“ ‘I forgive him, but I owe him nothing.

“ ‘My eldest sons never loved me, never petted me, scarcely treated me as a mother. During my whole life I was everything that I ought to have been to them, and I owe them nothing more after my death. The ties of blood cannot exist without daily and constant affection. An ungrateful son is less than a stranger ; he is a culprit, for he has no right to be indifferent toward his mother.

“ ‘I have always trembled before men, before their unjust laws, their inhuman customs, their shameful prejudices. Before God, I have no longer any fear. Dead, I fling aside disgraceful hypocrisy ; I dare to speak my thoughts, and to avow and to sign the secret of my heart.

“ ‘I therefore leave that part of my fortune of which the law allows me to dispose, as a deposit with my dear lover Pierre-Gennes-Simon de Bourneval, to revert afterward to our dear son René.’

“ (This wish is, moreover, formulated more precisely in a notarial deed.)

“ ‘And I declare before the Supreme Judge who hears me, that I should have cursed Heaven and my own existence, if I had not met my lover’s deep, devoted, tender, unshaken affection, if I had not felt in his arms that the Creator made His creatures to love, sustain, and console each other, and to weep together in the hours of sadness.

“ ‘Monsieur de Courcils is the father of my two eldest sons ; René alone owes his life to Monsieur de Bourneval. I pray to the Master of men and of their destinies to place father and son above social prejudices, to make them love each other until they die, and to love me also in my coffin.

“ ‘These are my last thoughts, and my last wish.

“ ‘MATHILDE DE CROIXLUCE.’

“ Monsieur de Courcils had risen, and he cried :

“ ‘It is the will of a madwoman.’

“ Then Monsieur de Bourneval stepped forward and said in a loud penetrating voice : ‘I, Simon de Bourneval, solemnly declare that this writing contains nothing but the strict truth, and I am ready to prove it by letters which I possess.’

“ On hearing that, Monsieur de Courcils went up to him, and I thought that they were going to collar each other. There they stood, both of them tall, one stout and the other thin, both trembling. My mother’s husband stammered out :

“ ‘You are a worthless wretch !’

“ And the other replied in a loud, dry voice :

“ ‘We will meet elsewhere, Monsieur. I should have slapped your ugly face, and challenged you long since, if I had not, before all else, thought of the peace of mind, during her lifetime, of that poor woman whom you made to suffer so much.’

“ Then, turning to me, he said :

“ ‘You are my son ; will you come with me ? I have no right to take you away, but I shall assume it, if you will allow me.’ I shook his hand without replying, and we went out together ; I was certainly three-parts mad.

“ Two days later Monsieur de Bourneval killed Monsieur de Courcils in a duel. My brothers, fearing the terrible scandal, held their tongues. I offered them, and they accepted, half the fortune which my mother had left me. I took my real father’s name, renouncing that which the law gave me, but

which was not really mine. Monsieur de Bourneval has been dead for five years, and I am still mourning for him."

He rose from his chair, took a few steps, and, standing in front of me, said :

"I hold that my mother's will was one of the most beautiful and loyal, one of the greatest acts that a woman could accomplish. Do you not agree with me?"

I held out my two hands :

"Most certainly I do, my friend."

AT SEA

THE FOLLOWING LINES RECENTLY APPEARED IN THE PRESS :

“BOULOGNE-SUR-MER, January 22.

“From our correspondent.

“A frightful disaster has occurred which throws into consternation our maritime population, so grievously afflicted for the last two years. The fishing-boat commanded by Captain Javel, entering into port, was carried to the west, and broken upon the rocks of the breakwater near the pier. In spite of the efforts of the lifeboat, and of life-lines shot out to them, four men and a cabin-boy perished. The bad weather continues. Further wrecks are feared.”

Who is this Captain Javel? Is he the brother of the one-armed Javel? If this poor man tossed by the waves, and dead perhaps, under the *débris* of his boat cut in pieces, is the one I think he is, he witnessed, eighteen years ago, another drama, terrible and simple as are all the formidable dramas of the sea.

Javel, senior, was then master of a smack. The smack is the fishing-boat *par excellence*. Solid, fearing no kind of weather, with round body, rolled incessantly by the waves, like a cork, always lashed by the harsh, salty winds of the Channel, it travels the sea indefatigably, with sail filled, carrying in its wake a net which reaches the bottom of the ocean, detaching all the sleeping creatures from the rocks, the flat fishes glued to the sand, the heavy crabs with their hooked claws, and the lobster with his pointed moustaches.

When the breeze is fresh and the waves choppy, the boat

puts about to fish. A rope is fastened to the end of a great wooden shank tipped with iron, which is let down by means of two cables slipping over two spools at the extreme end of the craft. And the boat, driving under wind and current, drags after her this apparatus, which ravages and devastates the bottom of the sea.

Javel had on board his younger brother, four men, and a cabin-boy. He had set out from Boulogne in fair weather to cast the nets. Then, suddenly, the wind arose and a squall drove the boat before the wind. It reached the coast of England; but a tremendous sea was beating against the cliffs and the shore so that it was impossible to enter port. The little boat put to sea again and returned to the coast of France. The storm continued to make the piers unapproachable, enveloping with foam, noise and danger every place of refuge.

The fishing-boat set out again, running along the tops of the billows, tossed about, shaken up, streaming, buffeted by mountains of water, but game in spite of all, accustomed to heavy weather, which sometimes kept it wandering for five or six days between the two countries, unable to land in the one or the other.

Finally, the hurricane ceased, when they came out into open sea, and although the sea was still high, the master ordered them to cast the net. Then the great fishing-tackle was thrown overboard, and two men at one side and two at the other began to unwind from windlasses the cable which held it. Suddenly it touched the bottom, but a high wave tipped the boat forward. Javel, junior, who was in the prow directing the casting of the net, tottered and found his arm caught between the cable, slackened an instant by the motion, and the wood on which it was turning. He made a desperate effort with his other hand to lift the cable, but the net was dragging again and the taut cable would not yield.

Rigid with pain, he called. Every one ran to him. His brother left the helm. They threw their full force upon the

rope, forcing it away from the arm it was grinding. It was in vain. "We must cut it," said a sailor, and he drew from his pocket a large knife which could, in two blows, save young Javel's arm. But to cut was to lose the net, and the net meant money, much money—fifteen hundred francs; it belonged to the elder Javel, who was keen on his property.

In anguish he cried out: "No, don't cut; I'll luff the ship." And he ran to the wheel, putting the helm about. The boat scarcely obeyed, paralysed by the net, which counteracted its power, and driven besides by the force of the leeway and the wind.

Young Javel fell to his knees with set teeth and haggard eyes. He said nothing. His brother returned, still anxious about the sailor's knife.

"Wait! wait!" he said. "Don't cut; we must cast anchor."

The anchor was thrown overboard, all the chain paid out, and they then tried to take a turn around the capstan with the cables in order to loosen them from the weight of the net. The cables finally relaxed, and they released the arm, which hung inert under a sleeve of bloody woollen cloth.

Young Javel seemed to have lost his mind. They removed his jersey, and then saw something horrible; a mass of bruised flesh, from which the blood was gushing, as if it were forced by a pump. The man himself looked at his arm and murmured: "Done for."

Then, as the hæmorrhage made a pool on the deck of the boat, the sailors cried: "He'll lose all his blood. We must bind the artery!"

They then took some twine, thick, black, tarred twine, and, twisting it around the limb above the wound, bound it with all their strength. Little by little the jets of blood stopped, and finally ceased altogether.

Young Javel arose, his arm hanging by his side. He took it by the other hand, raised it, turned it, shook it. Everything was broken; the bones were crushed completely; only the

muscles held it to his body. He looked at it thoughtfully, with sad eyes. Then he seated himself on a folded sail, and his comrades came around him, advising him to soak it continually to prevent gangrene.

They put a bucket near him and every moment he would dip into it with a glass and bathe the horrible wound by letting a thin stream of clear water fall upon it.

"You would be better down below," said his brother. He went down, but after an hour he came up again, feeling better not to be alone. And then, he preferred the open air. He sat down again upon the sail and continued bathing his arm.

The fishing was good. The huge fish with white bodies were lying beside him, shaken by the spasms of death. He looked at them without ceasing to sprinkle the mangled flesh.

When they started to return to Boulogne, another gale of wind began to blow. The little boat resumed its mad course, bounding, and tumbling, shaking the poor wounded man.

Night came on. The weather was heavy until daybreak. At sunrise, they could see England again, but as the sea was a little less rough, they turned toward France, beating against the wind.

Toward evening, young Javel called his comrades and showed them black traces and the hideous signs of decay around that part of his arm which was no longer joined to his body.

The sailors looked at it, giving advice: "That must be gangrene," said one.

"It must have salt water on it," said another.

Then they brought salt water and poured it on the wound. The wounded man became livid, grinding his teeth, and twisting with pain; but he uttered no cry.

When the burning grew less, he said to his brother: "Give me your knife." The brother gave it to him.

"Hold this arm up for me, and pull it."

His brother did as he was asked.

Then he began to cut. He cut gently, with caution, severing the last tendons with the blade as sharp as a razor. Soon he had only a stump. He heaved a deep sigh and said: "That had to be done. Otherwise, it would be all up."

He seemed relieved and breathed energetically. He continued to pour water on the part of his arm remaining to him.

The night was still bad and they could not land. When the day appeared, young Javel took his severed arm and examined it carefully. Putrefaction had begun. His comrades came also and examined it, passing it from hand to hand, touching it, turning it over, and smelling it.

His brother said: "It's about time to throw that into the sea."

Young Javel was angry; he replied: "No! oh, no! I will not. It is mine, isn't it? Since it is my arm——" He took it and held it between his legs.

"It won't grow any less putrid," said the elder.

Then an idea came to the wounded man. In order to keep the fish when they remained a long time at sea, they had with them barrels of salt. "Couldn't I put it in there in the brine?" he asked.

"That's so," declared the others.

Then they emptied one of the barrels, already full of fish from the last few days, and, at the bottom, they deposited the arm. Then they turned salt upon it and replaced the fishes, one by one.

One of the sailors made a little joke: "Take care we don't happen to sell it at the fish-market."

And everybody laughed except the Javel brothers.

The wind still blew. They beat about in sight of Boulogne until the next day at ten o'clock. The wounded man still poured water on his arm. From time to time he would get up and walk from one end of the boat to the other. His brother, who was at the wheel, shook his head and followed him with his eye.

Finally, they came into port.

The doctor examined the wound and declared it was doing well. He dressed it properly and ordered rest. But Javel could not go to bed without having his arm again, and went quickly back to the dock to find the barrel, which he had marked with a cross.

They emptied it in front of him, and he found his arm well preserved in the salt, wrinkled and in good condition. He wrapped it in a napkin brought for this purpose, and took it home.

His wife and children examined carefully this fragment of their father, touching the fingers, taking up the grains of salt that had lodged under the nails. Then they sent for the carpenter, who measured it for a little coffin.

The next day the complete crew of the fishing-smack followed the funeral of the severed arm. The two brothers, side by side, conducted the ceremony. The parish beadle held the coffin under his arm.

Javel, junior, gave up going to sea. He obtained a small position in port, and, later, whenever he spoke of the accident, he would say to his auditor, in a low tone: "If my brother had been willing to cut the net, I should still have my arm, for certain. But he was thinking of his valuable property."

A NORMAN

WE HAD JUST LEFT ROUEN, AND WERE GOING ALONG THE road to Jumièges at a brisk trot. The light carriage spun along between the fields, then the horse slowed down to climb the hill of Canteleu.

At that point there is one of the most magnificent views in the world. Behind us Rouen, the town of churches, of Gothic belfries, carved like ornaments of ivory; in front, Saint-Sever, the suburb of factories, which raises its thousand smoking chimneys to the great sky, opposite the thousand sacred spires of the old city.

Here is the steeple of the cathedral, the highest of the human monuments; and down there the "Fire Pump" of "La Foudre," its rival, almost as tall, which overtops by a metre the highest pyramid of Egypt.

Before us the undulating Seine winds along, sown with islands, bordered on the right by white cliffs, crowned by a forest, and on the left by immense level fields, with another forest on their edge, far away in the distance.

From place to place, great ships were anchored along the banks of the wide river. Three enormous steamers were going out, one after another, toward Havre; and a string of boats consisting of a three-master, two schooners, and a brig, were coming up to Rouen, towed by a little tug, which vomited a cloud of black smoke.

My companion, born in the country, did not see this surprising landscape from the same point of view as I. But he smiled continually; he seemed to be laughing to himself. Suddenly he exclaimed: "Ah! you are about to see something funny—the chapel of Father Matthew. That is something really good, my boy."

I looked at him in astonishment. He continued :

"I am going to give you a flavour of Normandy that will remain in your nose. Father Matthew is the handsomest Norman in the province and his chapel is one of the wonders of the world, no more nor less. But I will give you first a few words of explanation. Father Matthew, or 'Father Booze' as they also call him, is an old sergeant-major, returned to his native village. He unites, in admirable proportions, the perfect humbug of the old soldier and the sly malice of the Norman. On his return to these parts, thanks to innumerable protectors and incredible trickeries, he was made the guardian of a miraculous chapel, a chapel protected by the Virgin, and frequented principally by pregnant girls. He baptized the marvellous statue there as : 'Notre Dame du Gros-Ventre,' and he treats it with a certain mocking familiarity which does not exclude respect. He has himself composed and had printed a special prayer for his GOOD VIRGIN. This prayer is a masterpiece of unintentional irony, of Norman wit, where ridicule is mixed with fear of the saint, a superstitious fear of secret influence of some kind. He does not believe much in his patron saint ; nevertheless, he believes in her a little and treats her gently as a matter of policy.

"Here is the beginning of this extraordinary prayer :

" 'Our good Lady, the Virgin Mary, natural Patroness of girl-mothers, in this country and in all the earth, protect your servant who has sinned in a moment of forgetfulness.'

"The supplication terminates thus :

" 'Especially, do not forget to speak for me to your sainted Husband, and intercede with God the Father that He may accord me a good husband like your own.'

"This prayer, forbidden by the clergy of the country, is sold by him privately, and is regarded as helpful by those who repeat it with unction. In fact, he speaks of the good Virgin as a valet might of his master, some redoubtable prince, knowing all his little intimate secrets. He knows a host of amusing

stories about her which he whispers amongst friends after he has been drinking.

"But you must see for yourself.

"As the revenue furnished by the Patroness did not seem sufficient, he has added to his chief asset, the Virgin, a little trade in saints. He keeps them all, or nearly all. And, as room was lacking in the chapel he stocked them in the woodshed, from which he gets them whenever the faithful ask for them. He has carved these wonderfully comical statuettes himself, out of wood, and painted them all green, a solid colour, one year when they painted his house. You know the saints heal maladies, but each has his specialty; and one must not run into error or confusion in these things. They are jealous one of the other, like play-actors.

"So that they may not make any mistake, the poor old women come and consult Matthew.

"'For bad ears, what saint is best?' they say.

"'Well, there is Saint Osymus, who is good; and there is also Saint Pamphilius, who is not bad,' he tells them.

"That is not all. When Matthew has time on his hands he drinks. But he drinks like an artist, one that is sure of himself, so much so that he is tipsy regularly every evening. He is tipsy, but he knows it; he knows it so well that he notes each day the exact degree of his drunkenness. It is his principal occupation. The chapel comes afterward.

"And he has invented—listen to this and prepare for a surprise—he has invented the boozometer. The instrument does not yet exist, but Matthew's observations are as precise as those of a mathematician. You will hear him say continually:

"'Since Monday, I have not gone above forty-five.' Or, 'I was between fifty-two and fifty-eight,' or 'I had sixty-six to seventy,' or, perhaps, 'Ah! confound it, I believed I was in the fifties, when here I find I was at seventy-five!'

"He never makes a mistake. He says that he has never yet

reached the hundredth degree, but, as he admits that his observations cease to be precise after he has passed ninety, one cannot absolutely rely upon this statement.

"When Matthew recognises that he has passed ninety, you may be sure that he is really tipsy. On these occasions, his wife, Mélie, another marvel, works herself into great anger. She waits for him at the door when he enters, and shrieks: 'Here you are, you nasty pig, you drunken good-for-nothing.'

"Then Matthew, no longer laughing, plants himself before her, and in severe tone says: 'Be still, Mélie, this is no time to talk. Wait till to-morrow.'

"If she continues to vociferate, he approaches her, and with trembling voice says: 'Shut your jaw; I am in the nineties; I can no longer measure; I am going to hurt someone; take care!'

"Then Mélie beats a retreat.

"If she tries the next day to return to the subject, he laughs in her face and answers: 'Come, come! enough of that; that is all over. So long as I have not reached the hundredth degree, there is no harm done. But if I pass that, I will allow you to correct me, I give you my word!'"

We had reached the summit of the hill. The road lay through the wonderful forest of Roumare. The autumn, the marvellous autumn, mixed her gold and purple with the last green leaves, still vivid, as if some drops of sunlight had rained down from the sky into the thickest of the wood.

We crossed Duclair; then, instead of continuing toward Jumièges, my friend turned to the left, and, taking a short-cut, struck into the wood. And soon, from the summit of a green hill, we discovered anew the magnificent valley of the Seine and the tortuous river itself, winding along at our feet.

Upon the right, a little building, with a slate roof and a clock-tower as high as an umbrella, leaned against a pretty house with green shutters, all clothed in honeysuckle and roses.

A loud voice cried out: "Here are some friends!" And

Matthew appeared upon the threshold. He was a man of sixty, thin, wearing a pointed beard and long, white moustaches. My companion shook hands with him and introduced me. Matthew made us enter a cool, clean kitchen, which also served as a living-room.

"I, sir," said Matthew, "have no distinguished apartment. I like better not to get too far from the eatables. The pots and pans, you see, are company." Then, turning toward my friend, he added :

"Why have you come on Thursday? You know well that it is My Lady's consultation day. I cannot go out this afternoon."

Then, running to the door, he uttered a terrible call : "Mé-li-ee!" which must have made the sailors raise their heads in the ships going up and down the river, at the bottom of the valley.

Mélie did not answer.

Then Matthew winked maliciously : "She is not pleased with me, you see, because yesterday I was up to ninety."

My neighbour began to laugh. "Ninety, Matthew! How was that?"

Matthew answered : "I will tell you. I found last year only twenty *rasières* of cider apples. There were no more, but in order to make good cider these are the best. I made a barrellful and yesterday I tapped it. Nectar, that is real nectar; you will say so, too. I had Polyte here. We took a drink and then another drink without quenching our thirst, for one could drink it till to-morrow. I drank so much, one drink after another, that I felt a coolness in my stomach. I said to Polyte : 'If we should take a glass of brandy, now, it would heat us up.' He consented. But brandy—that put a fire in my body, so hot that it was necessary to return to the cider. So there it was! From coolness to heat and from heat to coolness, I perceived that I was in the nineties. Polyte was far beyond a hundred."

The door opened. Mélie appeared, and immediately, before she said "Good day" to us, exclaimed: "Pigs! You were far beyond the hundred mark, both of you!"

Matthew was angry, but answered: "Say not so, Mélie, say not so; I have never been beyond a hundred."

They gave us an exquisite breakfast, before the door under two lime-trees, at the side of the little chapel of "Notre Dame du Gros-Ventre," with the beautiful landscape before us. And Matthew related to us, with raillery mingled with credulity, some unlikely stories of miracles.

We had drunk much of the adorable cider, pungent and sweet, cool and powerful, which he preferred to all liquids, and were smoking our pipes, sitting astride our chairs, when two good women presented themselves.

They were old, dried, and bent. After bowing, they asked for Saint Blanc. Matthew winked his eye toward us, and said:

"I will go and get him for you." And he disappeared into his woodshed.

He remained there five minutes, then returned with face filled with consternation. Raising his arms, he declared:

"I don't know at all where he is. I cannot find him. I am sure that I had him!" Then, making a horn of his hands, he called: "Mélie!"

From the foot of the garden his wife answered: "What is it?"

"Where is Saint Blanc? I can't find him in the shed!"

Then Mélie threw back this explanation:

"Wasn't it him you took to stop the hole in the rabbit-hutch last week?"

Matthew started. "Good God. Maybe that's so."

Then he said to the two women: "Follow me."

They followed. We almost suffocated with laughter. In fact, Saint Blanc, stuck in the earth like a common stake, stained with mud and filth, was being used to make one corner of the rabbit-hutch.

When they perceived him, the two good women fell on their knees, crossed themselves, and began to murmur their *oremus*. Matthew hurried to them. "Wait," said he, "you are kneeling in the dirt; I will bring you some straw."

And he went to find some straw and made them a prayer cushion. Then, seeing that his saint was muddy, and believing, without doubt, that it would be bad for the trade, he added: "I am going to clean him up a bit."

He took a pail of water and a brush and began to wash the wooden figure vigorously. Meantime the two old women continued to pray.

When he had finished, he said: "Now it is all right." And then he brought us back for another drink.

As he raised the glass to his lips, he stopped and said, with an air of embarrassment: "Well, indeed, when I put Saint Blanc in the rabbit-hutch, I was sure he would never earn me another penny. For two years there had been no demand for him. But the saints, you see, never die."

He drank and continued:

"Come, let us have another. Amongst friends you must never go less than fifty, and we're only at thirty-eight."

IN THE COUNTRY

THE TWO COTTAGES STOOD SIDE BY SIDE AT THE FOOT OF A hill near a little seaside resort. The two peasants laboured hard on the fertile soil to rear their little ones, of whom each family had four.

Before the adjoining doors a whole troop of brats swarmed from morning till night. The two eldest were six years old, and the youngest were about fifteen months; the marriages, and afterwards the births, having taken place nearly simultaneously in both families.

The two mothers could hardly distinguish their own offspring among the lot, and as for the fathers, they mixed them up completely. The eight names danced in their heads; they were always getting them mixed up; and when they wished to call one child, the men often called three names before getting the right one.

The first of the two cottages, as you came up from the watering-place, Rolleport, was occupied by the Tuvaches, who had three girls and one boy; the other house sheltered the Vallins, who had one girl and three boys.

They all subsisted frugally on soup, potatoes and fresh air. At seven o'clock in the morning, then at noon, then at six o'clock in the evening, the housewives got their broods together to give them their food, as the gooseherds collect their flocks. The children were seated, according to age, before the wooden table, polished by fifty years of use; the mouths of the youngest hardly reaching the level of the table. Before them was placed a bowl filled with bread, soaked in the water in which the potatoes had been boiled, half a cabbage and three onions; and the whole line ate until

their hunger was appeased. The mother herself fed the smallest.

A little meat in the pot on Sundays was a feast for all ; and the father on this day sat longer over the meal, repeating : " I wish we could have this every day."

One afternoon, in the month of August, a phaeton unexpectedly stopped in front of the cottages, and a young woman, who was driving the horses, said to the gentleman sitting at her side :

" Oh, look at all those children, Henri ! How pretty they are, tumbling about in the dust, like that ! "

The man did not answer, accustomed to these outbursts of admiration, which were a pain and almost a reproach to him. The young woman continued :

" I must hug them ! Oh, how I should like to have one of them—that one there—the little tiny one ! "

Springing down from the carriage, she ran toward the children, took one of the two youngest—a Tuvache child—and lifting him up in her arms, she kissed him passionately on his dirty cheeks, on his tousled hair daubed with earth, and on his little hands, with which he fought vigorously to get away from the caresses, which displeased him.

Then she got into the carriage again, and drove off at a lively trot. But she returned the following week, and seating herself on the ground, took the youngster in her arms, stuffed him with cakes, gave sweets to all the others, and played with them like a young girl, while the husband waited patiently in the carriage.

She returned again ; made the acquaintance of the parents, and reappeared every day with her pockets full of dainties and pennies.

Her name was Madame Henri d'Hubières.

One morning, on arriving, her husband alighted with her, and without stopping to talk to the children, who now knew her well, she entered the farmer's cottage.

They were busy chopping wood for the fire. They rose to their feet in surprise, brought forward chairs, and waited expectantly.

Then the woman, in a broken, trembling voice, began :

" My good people, I have come to see you, because I should like—I should like to take—your little boy with me——"

The country people, too bewildered to think, did not answer.

She recovered her breath, and continued : " We are alone, my husband and I. We would keep it. Are you willing ? "

The peasant woman began to understand. She asked :

" You want to take Charlot from us ? Oh, no, indeed ! "

Then M. d'Hubières intervened :

" My wife has not made her meaning clear. We wish to adopt him, but he will come back to see you. If he turns out well, as there is every reason to expect, he will be our heir. If we, by any chance, should have children, he will share equally with them ; but if he should not reward our care, we should give him, when he comes of age, a sum of twenty thousand francs, which will be deposited immediately in his name, with a lawyer. As we have thought also of you, we will pay you, until your death, a pension of one hundred francs a month. Do you understand me ? "

The woman had risen to her feet, furious.

" You want me to sell you Charlot ? Oh, no, that's not the sort of thing to ask of a mother ! Oh, no ! That would be an abomination ! "

The man, grave and deliberate, said nothing ; but approved of what his wife said by a continued nodding of his head.

Madame d'Hubières, in dismay, began to weep ; turning to her husband, with a voice full of tears, the voice of a child used to having all its wishes gratified, she stammered :

" They will not do it, Henri, they will not do it. "

Then he made a last attempt : " But, my friends, think of the child's future, of his happiness, of——"

The peasant woman, however, exasperated, cut him short :

"We know all about that! We've heard all that before! Get out of here, and don't let me see you again—the idea of wanting to take away a child like that!"

Madame d'Hubières remembered that there were two quite young children, and she asked, through her tears, with the tenacity of a wilful and spoiled woman:

"But is the other little one not yours?"

Father Tuvache answered: "No, it is our neighbours'. You can go to them if you wish." And he went back into his house, whence could be heard the indignant voice of his wife.

The Vallins were at table, slowly eating slices of bread which they parsimoniously spread with a little rancid butter on a plate between the two.

M. d'Hubières recommenced his proposals, but with more insinuations, more oratorical precautions, more shrewdness.

The two country people shook their heads, in sign of refusal, but when they learned that they were to have a hundred francs a month, they considered the matter, consulting one another by glances, much disturbed. They kept silent for a long time, tortured, hesitating. At last the woman asked: "What do you say to it, father?" In a weighty tone he said: "I say that it's not to be despised."

Madame d'Hubières, trembling with anguish, spoke of the future of their child, of his happiness, and of the money which he could give them later.

The peasant asked: "This pension of twelve hundred francs, will it be promised before a lawyer?"

M. d'Hubières responded: "Why, certainly, beginning with to-morrow."

The women, who was thinking it over, continued:

"A hundred francs a month is not enough to pay for depriving us of the child. That child would be working in a few years; we must have a hundred and twenty francs."

Tapping her foot with impatience, Madame d'Hubières

granted it at once, and, as she wished to carry off the child with her, she gave a hundred francs extra, as a present, while her husband drew up a paper. And the young woman, radiant, carried off the howling brat, as one carries away a wished-for knick-knack from a shop.

The Tuvaches, from their door, watched her departure, silent, serious, perhaps regretting their refusal.

Nothing more was heard of little Jean Vallin. The parents went to the lawyer every month to collect their hundred and twenty francs. They had quarrelled with their neighbours, because Mother Tuvache grossly insulted them, continually, repeating from door to door that one must be unnatural to sell one's child; that it was horrible, disgusting bribery. Sometimes she would take her Charlot in her arms, ostentatiously exclaiming, as if he understood:

"I didn't sell *you*, I didn't! I didn't sell *you*, my little one! I'm not rich, but I don't sell my children!"

And this went on for years and years. Every day coarse jeers were shouted outside the door so that they could be heard in the neighbouring house. Mother Tuvache finally believed herself superior to the whole country-side because she had not sold Charlot. Those who spoke of her used to say:

"I know, of course, that it was a tempting offer; yet, she behaved like a real mother."

She was cited as a model and Charlot, who was nearly eighteen, brought up with this idea, which was constantly repeated, thought himself superior to his comrades because he had not been sold.

The Vallins lived comfortably, thanks to the pension. That was the cause of the unappeasable fury of the Tuvaches, who had remained miserably poor. Their eldest went away to serve his time in the army; Charlot alone remained to labour with his old father, to support the mother and two younger sisters.

He had reached twenty-one years when, one morning, a

brilliant carriage stopped before the two cottages. A young gentleman, with a gold watch-chain, got out, giving his hand to an aged, white-haired lady. The old lady said to him : " It is there, my child, at the second house." And he entered the house of the Vallins as if he were at home.

The old mother was washing her aprons ; the infirm father was asleep in the chimney-corner. Both raised their heads, and the young man said :

" Good morning, papa ; good morning, mamma ! "

They both stood up, frightened ! In a flutter, the peasant woman dropped her soap into the water, and stammered :

" Is it you, my child ? Is it you, my child ? "

He took her in his arms and hugged her, repeating : " Good morning, mamma," while the old man, all trembling, said, in the calm tone which he never lost : " Here you are, back again, Jean," as if he had just seen him a month ago.

When they had recognised each other again, the parents wished to take their boy out in the neighbourhood, and show him. They took him to the mayor, to the deputy, to the priest, and to the schoolmaster.

Charlot, standing on the threshold of his cottage, watched him pass.

In the evening, at supper, he said to the old people : " You must have been stupid to let the Vallins' boy be taken."

The mother answered, obstinately : " I wouldn't sell *my* child."

The father remained silent. The son continued :

" It is unfortunate to be sacrificed like that."

Then Father Tuvache, in an angry tone, said :

" Are you going to reproach us for having kept you ? "

And the young man said, brutally :

" Yes, I reproach you for having been such fools. Parents like you cause the misfortune of children. You deserve that I should leave you."

The old woman wept over her plate. She moaned, as she

swallowed the spoonfuls of soup, half of which she spilled :
" One may kill oneself to bring up children ! "

Then the boy said, roughly : " I'd rather not have been born than be what I am. When I saw the other fellow, my heart stood still. I said to myself : ' See what I should have been now ! ' " He got up : " See here, I feel that I would do better not to stay here, because I would throw it in your faces from morning till night, and I would make your life miserable. I'll never forgive you for that ! "

The two old people were silent, downcast, in tears.

He continued : " No, the thought of that would be too much. I'd rather look for a living somewhere else. "

He opened the door. The sound of voices entered. The Vallins were celebrating the return of their child.

Then Charlot stamped with rage, and, turning to his parents, he shouted :

" You silly yokels ! "

And he disappeared into the night.

A COCK CROWED

MADAME BERTHE D'AVANCELLES UP TO THAT TIME HAD resisted all the prayers of her despairing admirer, Baron Joseph de Croissard. In Paris during the winter he had pursued her ardently, and now he was giving fêtes and shooting parties in her honour at his château at Carville, in Normandy.

Monsieur d'Avancelles, her husband, saw nothing and knew nothing, as usual. It was said that he lived apart from his wife on account of physical weakness, for which Madame d'Avancelles would not pardon him. He was a stout, bald little man, with short arms, legs, neck, nose and everything else, while Madame d'Avancelles, on the contrary, was a tall, dark and determined young woman, who laughed loudly in her husband's face, while he called her openly "Mrs. Housewife," and who looked at the broad shoulders, strong build and fair moustaches of her recognised admirer, Baron Joseph de Croissard, with a certain amount of tenderness.

She had not, however, granted him anything as yet. The Baron was ruining himself for her, and there was a constant round of fêtes, hunting parties and new pleasures, to which he invited the neighbouring nobility. All day long the hounds bayed in the woods, as they followed the fox or the wild boar, and every night dazzling fireworks mingled their burning plumes with the stars, while the illuminated windows of the drawing-room cast long rays of light on the wide lawns, where shadows were moving to and fro.

It was autumn, the russet-coloured season, and the leaves were whirling about on the grass like flights of birds. One noticed the smell of damp earth in the air, of the naked earth,

as one smells the odour of naked flesh, when a woman's dress falls from her, after a ball.

One evening in the previous spring, during an entertainment, Madame d'Avancelles had said to Monsieur de Croissard, who was worrying her by his importunities : " If I do succumb to you, my friend, it will not be before the fall of the leaf. I have too many things to do this summer to have any time for it." He had not forgotten that bold and amusing speech, and every day he became more pressing, every day he advanced in his approaches, and gained a step in the heart of the fair, audacious woman, who seemed only to be resisting for form's sake.

It was the eve of a great wild-boar hunt, and Madame Berthe said to the Baron with a laugh : " Baron, if you kill the brute, I shall have something for you." And so, at dawn he was up and out, to try to discover where the wild animal had its lair. He accompanied his beaters, settled the places for the relays, and organised everything personally to insure his triumph, and when the horns gave the signal for setting out, he appeared in a closely-fitting coat of scarlet and gold, with his waist drawn in tight, his chest expanded, his eyes radiant, and as fresh and strong as if he had just got out of bed. They set out, and the wild boar started off through the underwood as soon as he was dislodged, followed by the hounds in full cry, while the horses set off at a gallop through the narrow paths of the forest, and the carriages, which followed the chase at a distance, drove noiselessly along the soft roads.

Out of mischief, Madame d'Avancelles kept the Baron by her side, lagging behind at a walk in an interminably long and straight alley, over which four rows of oaks hung, so as to form almost an arch, while he, trembling with love and anxiety, listened with one ear to the young woman's bantering chatter, while with the other he listened to the blast of the horns and to the cry of the hounds as they receded in the distance.

" So you do not love me any longer ? " she observed.

"How can you say such things?" he replied. And she continued: "But you seem to be paying more attention to the sport than to me." He groaned, and said: "Did you not order me to kill the animal myself?" And she replied gravely: "Of course I am counting on that. You must kill it before my eyes."

Then he trembled in his saddle, spurred his horse until it reared, and, losing all patience, exclaimed: "But, by Jove, Madame, that is impossible if we remain here." And she retorted laughingly: "But it must be done or . . . so much the worse for you." Then she spoke tenderly to him, laying her hand on his arm, or stroking his horse's mane, as if by mistake.

Just then they turned to the right, into a narrow path which was overhung by trees, and suddenly, to avoid a branch which barred their way, she leaned towards him so closely, that he felt her hair tickling his neck, and he suddenly threw his arms brutally round her and, pressing her forehead with his thick moustache, he gave her a furious kiss.

At first she did not move, and remained motionless under that mad caress; then she turned her head with a jerk, and either by accident or design her little lips met his, under their tuft of fair hair, and a moment afterwards, either from confusion or remorse, she struck her horse with her riding-whip, and went off at full gallop, and they rode on like that for a time, without even exchanging a look.

The noise of the hunt came nearer, the thickets seemed to tremble, and suddenly the wild boar broke through the bushes, covered with blood, and trying to shake off the hounds which had fastened upon him, and the Baron, uttering a shout of triumph, exclaimed: "Let him who loves me follow me!" And he disappeared in the copse, as if the wood had swallowed him up.

When she reached an open glade a few minutes later, he was just getting up, covered with mud, his coat torn, and his hands bloody, while the brute was lying stretched out at full

length, with the Baron's hunting-knife driven into its shoulder up to the hilt.

The quarry was cut by torchlight on a night that was wild and melancholy. The moon threw a yellow light on the torches, which made the night misty with their resinous smoke. The hounds devoured the wild boar's stinking entrails, and snarled and fought for them, while the beaters and the gentlemen, standing in a circle round the spoil, blew their horns as loud as they could. The flourish of the hunting-horns resounded beyond the woods on that still night and was repeated by the echoes of the distant valleys, awaking the timid stags, rousing the yelping foxes, and disturbing the little grey rabbits in their gambols at the edge of the glades.

The frightened night-birds flew over the eager pack of hounds, while the women, who were moved by all these gentle and violent things, leaned rather heavily on the men's arms; and turned aside into the pathways, before the hounds had finished their meal. Madame d'Avancelles, feeling languid after that day of fatigue and tenderness, said to the Baron: "Will you take a turn in the park, my friend?" And without replying, but trembling and nervous, he put his arm around her, and immediately they kissed each other. They walked slowly under the almost leafless trees through which the moonbeams filtered, and their love, their desires, their longing for a closer embrace became so vehement, that they almost sank down at the foot of a tree.

The horns were silent, and the tired hounds were sleeping in the kennels. "Let us return," the young woman said, and they went back.

When they got to the château and before they went in, she said in a weak voice: "I am so tired that I shall go to bed, my friend." And as he opened his arms for a last kiss, she ran away, saying as a last good-bye: "No. . . . I am going to sleep. . . . Let him who loves me follow me!"

An hour later, when the whole silent château seemed dead

the Baron crept stealthily out of his room, and went and scratched at her door, and as she did not reply, he tried to open it, and found that it was not locked.

She was dreaming as she leaned upon the window-ledge, and he threw himself at her knees, which he kissed madly, through her nightdress. She said nothing, but buried her delicate fingers caressingly in his hair, and suddenly, as if she had formed some great resolution, she whispered with a bold glance: "I shall come back, wait for me." And stretching out her hand, she pointed with her finger to an indistinct white spot at the end of the room; it was her bed.

Then, in the dark with trembling hands and scarcely knowing what he was doing, he quickly undressed, got into the cool sheets, and stretching himself out comfortably, he almost forgot his love in the pleasure of feeling the linen caress his tired body. She did not return, however, no doubt finding amusement in straining his patience. He closed his eyes with a feeling of exquisite comfort, and reflected peaceably while waiting for what he so ardently desired. But by degrees his limbs grew languid and his thoughts became indistinct and fleeting, until his great fatigue overcame him and he fell asleep.

He slept that unconquerable, heavy sleep of the worn-out hunter, and he slept until daylight; and then, as the window had remained half open, the crowing of a cock suddenly woke him, and the Baron opened his eyes, and feeling a woman's body against his, finding himself, much to his surprise, in a strange bed, and remembering nothing for a moment, he stammered:

"What? Where am I? What is the matter?"

Then she, who had not been asleep at all, looking at this unkempt man, with red eyes and thick lips, replied in the haughty tone of voice in which she spoke to her husband:

"It is nothing; it is only a cock crowing. Go to sleep again, Monsieur, it has nothing to do with you."

A SON

THE TWO OLD FRIENDS WERE WALKING IN THE GARDEN ALL in bloom, where life was stirred by the gay springtime.

One was a senator and the other a member of the French Academy, grave, both of them, full of reason and logic, but solemn—people of note and reputation.

At first they chattered about politics, exchanging thoughts, not upon ideas but men : personalities, which, in such matters, always take precedence over reasoned argument. Then they awoke old memories ; then they were silent, continuing to walk side by side, both relaxed by the sweetness of the air.

A great cluster of wallflowers sent forth their sweet and delicate perfume. A heap of flowers, of every kind and colour, threw their sweetness into the air, while a laburnum-tree, covered with yellow flowers, scattered to the wind its fine powder, a golden smoke which reminded one of honey, and carried, like the caressing powder of the perfumer, its embalmed seed across space.

The senator stopped, inhaled the fertile cloud that was floating by him, looked at the blossoming tree, resplendent as a sun, from which the pollen was now escaping. And he said :

“ When one thinks that these imperceptible atoms, which smell so nice, can bring into existence in a hundred places, miles from here, plants of their own kind, can start the sap and fibre of the female trees, and produce creatures with roots, which are born from a germ, as we are, mortal as we are, and which will be replaced by other beings of the same essence, just like us ! ”

Then, standing in front of the radiant laburnum-tree, whose

vivifying perfume permeated every breath of air, the senator added :

" Ah ! my fine fellow, if you were to count your children you would be woefully embarrassed. Here is one who brings them easily into the world, abandons them without remorse and worries little about them afterward."

The Academician replied : " We do the same, my friend."

The senator answered : " Yes, I do not deny that ; we do abandon them sometimes, but we know it, at least, and that constitutes our superiority."

The other man shook his head : " No, that is not what I mean ; you see, my dear fellow, there is scarcely a man who does not possess some unknown children, those children labelled *father unknown*, whom he has created, as this tree reproduces itself, almost unconsciously.

" If we had to establish the count of the women we have had, we should be, should we not, as embarrassed as this laburnum-tree which you are addressing, if it were called upon to enumerate its descendants ?

" From eighteen to forty, counting all our passing encounters and contacts of an hour, it may easily be granted that we have had intimate relations with two or three hundred women. Ah, well ! my friend, among this number are you sure that you have not made fruitful at least one, and that you have not, upon the streets or in prison, some blackguard son, who robs and assassinates honest people, that is to say, people like us ? or perhaps a daughter, in some house of ill-fame ? or perhaps, if she chanced to be abandoned by her mother, a cook in somebody's kitchen ?

" Remember further that nearly all women that we call ' public ' possess one or two children whose father they do not know, children caught in the hazard of their embraces at ten or twenty francs. In every trade, there is profit and loss. This offspring constitutes the ' loss ' of their profession. Who were their progenitors ? You—I—all of us, respectable men !

These are the results of our gay dinner parties, of our amusing evenings, of the hours when our well-fed bodies drive us to chance love encounters.

"Robbers, tramps, all such wretches, in short, are our children. And how much better that is for us than if we were theirs, for they reproduce also, these ruffians !

"Listen : I, for my part, have an ugly story on my conscience, which I would like to tell you. It brings me incessant remorse, and more than that, continual doubt and an unappeasable uncertainty which at times tortures me horribly.

"At the age of twenty-five I had undertaken, with one of my friends, now a *Conseiller d'Etat*, a journey through Brittany, on foot.

"After fifteen or twenty days of rapid walking, after having visited the Côtes-du-Nord, and a part of Finisterre, we arrived at Douarnenez ; from there, in a day's march, we reached the wild Pointe du Raz, via the Baie des Trépassés, where we slept in some village whose name ends in *of*. When the morning came a strange fatigue held my comrade in bed. I say 'bed' from habit, since our bed was composed simply of two bundles of straw.

"It was impossible to be sick in such a place. I forced him to get up, and we reached Audierne about four or five o'clock in the evening. The next day he was a little better. We set out again, but on the way he was taken with intolerable pains and it was with great difficulty that we were able to reach Pont-Labbé.

"There at least there was an inn. My friend went to bed, and the doctor, whom we called from Quimper, found a high fever, without quite determining the nature of it.

"Do you know Pont-Labbé ? No. Well, it is the most characteristic Breton town from Pointe du Raz to Morbihan—a region which contains the essence of Breton morals, and legends, and customs. To-day, even, this corner of the country

has scarcely changed at all. I say 'to-day, even,' because I return there now every year, alas !

"An old castle bathes the foot of its towers in a sad, dismal pond, peopled by flights of wild birds. Out of it flows a river, deep enough for coasting vessels to come up to the town. In the narrow streets, with the old houses, the men wear wide hats and embroidered waistcoats and four coats, one above the other ; the first, about the size of the hand, covers only the shoulder-blades, while the last stops just above the seat of the breeches.

"The girls, who are tall, beautiful, and fresh looking, wear a bodice of thick cloth which forms a breastplate and corset, constraining and leaving scarcely a suspicion of their swelling, martyrised busts. Their head-dresses are also strange : over the temples two embroidered bands in colour frame the face, binding the hair, which falls loose behind the head and is then carried up to the crown of the head under a curious bonnet often woven of gold or silver.

"The servant at our inn was eighteen years old at the most, with blue eyes, a pale blue, which were pierced with the two little black dots of the pupils ; and with short closely-set teeth, which she constantly showed in laughing and which seemed made for biting granite.

"She did not know a word of French, speaking only the Breton patois, as do most of her compatriots.

"Well, my friend was no better, and, although no disease was diagnosed, the doctor forbade his setting out, ordering complete rest. I spent the days with him, the little maid coming in frequently, bringing perhaps my dinner or some drink for him.

"I teased her a little, which seemed to amuse her, but we did not talk, naturally, since we could not understand each other.

"Well, one night, having remained with the sick man very late, when going to my room, I met the girl going to hers. It was just opposite my open door. Then suddenly, without

reflecting upon what I was doing, and more by way of a joke than anything, I seized her around the waist, and before she was over her astonishment I had thrown her and shut her in my room. She looked at me, startled, frightened, terrified, not daring to cry out for fear of scandal, and of being driven out by her master at first and her father afterwards.

"I had done this as a joke ; but when I saw her there, I was filled by the desire to possess her. There was a long and silent struggle, a struggle of body against body after the fashion of athletes, with arms tense, contracted, twisted ; rapid breathing, skin moist with perspiration. Oh ! she fought valiantly ; and sometimes we would hit a piece of furniture, a partition, or a chair ; then, still clutching each other, we would remain motionless for some seconds in fear lest the noise had awakened someone ; then we would commence again our desperate battle, I attacking, she resisting. Exhausted, finally, she fell ; and I took her brutally, upon the ground, upon the floor.

"As soon as she was released, she ran to the door, drew the bolts, and fled. I scarcely met her during the following days. She would not allow me to go near her. Then, when my comrade was better and we were to continue our journey, on the eve of our departure, she came barefooted, in her chemise, to the room where I had just retired.

"She threw herself into my arms, drew me to her passionately, and, until daylight, embraced me, caressed me, weeping and sobbing, giving me all the assurances of tenderness and despair that a woman can give when she does not know a word of our language.

"A week later I had forgotten this adventure, so common and frequent when one is travelling, the servants of the inns being generally destined to entertain travellers in this manner.

"Thirty years passed without my thinking of, or returning to, Pont-Labbé. Then, in 1876, I happened to go there, in the course of an excursion into Brittany which I had undertaken to

get material for a book and to make myself familiar with the landscape.

"Nothing seemed to have changed. The castle still soaked its grey walls in the pond at the entrance of the little town; the inn was there, too, although repaired, remodelled, with a modern air. On entering I was received by two young Breton girls of about eighteen, fresh and pretty, enlaced in their narrow lace cloth bodices, with their silver head-dress and large embroidered ear-caps.

"It was about six o'clock in the evening. I sat down to dine and as the host was serving me himself, fate, without doubt, led me to ask him: 'Did you know the former master of this house? I spent a fortnight here once, thirty years ago. I am speaking of very far-off times.'

"He answered: 'Those were my parents, sir.'

"Then I told him the occasion of my stopping there, recalling my being detained by the illness of my comrade. He did not allow me to finish:

"'Oh! I remember that perfectly,' said he; 'I was fifteen or sixteen then. You slept in the room at the end of the hall and your friend in the one that is now mine, looking on to the street.'

"Then for the first time, a vivid recollection of the pretty maid came back to me. I asked: 'Do you recall a nice little servant that your father had, who had, if I remember, pretty blue eyes and fine teeth?'

"He replied: 'Yes, sir; she died in childbirth some time after.'

"And pointing toward the courtyard where a thin lame man was turning over some manure, he added: 'That is her son.'

"I began to laugh. 'He is not beautiful, and does not resemble his mother at all. Takes after his father, no doubt.'

"The innkeeper replied: 'It may be; but they never knew who his father was. She died without telling, and no

one here knew she had a lover. It was a tremendous surprise when we found it out. No one would believe it.'

"A kind of disagreeable shiver went over me, one of those painful suggestions that touch the heart, like the approach of a heavy sorrow. I looked at the man in the yard. He came now to draw some water for the horses and carried two pails, limping, making grievous efforts with the leg that was shorter. He was ragged and hideously dirty, with long yellow hair, so matted that it hung in strings down his cheeks.

"The innkeeper added: 'He is not up to much, and has only been kept here out of charity. Perhaps he would have turned out better if he had been brought up properly. But, you see how it is, sir? No father, no mother, no money! My parents took pity on him as a child, but after all—he was not theirs, you see.'

"I said nothing.

"I went to bed in my old room, and all night I could think of nothing but that frightful stable boy, repeating to myself: 'What if that were my son! Could I have killed that girl and brought that creature into existence?'

"It was possible, of course. I resolved to speak to this man and to find out exactly the date of his birth. A difference of two months would set my doubts at rest.

"I had him come to me the next day. But he could not speak French either. He seemed not to understand anything. Besides, he was absolutely ignorant of his age, which one of the maids asked him for me. And he stood in front of me like an idiot, rolling his cap in his knotty and disgusting paws, laughing stupidly, with something of the old laugh of the mother in the corners of his mouth and eyes.

"But the host came along, and went to look up the birth certificate of the poor wretch. He entered this life eight months and twenty-six days after my departure from Pont-Labbé, because I recalled perfectly arriving at Lorient on the

fifteenth of August. The record said: 'Father unknown.' The mother was called Jeanne Karradec.

"Then my heart began to beat rapidly. I could not speak, I felt so choked with emotion. And I looked at that brute, whose long yellow hair seemed a more sordid dung heap than that of beasts. And the wretch, embarrassed by my look, ceased to laugh, turned his head, and tried to get away.

"Every day I would wander along the little river, sadly reflecting. But what was the use? Nothing could give me any certainty. For hours and hours I would weigh all the reasons, good and bad, for and against the chances of my paternity, worrying myself with intricate suppositions, only to return again to the horrible suspicion, then to the conviction, more atrocious still, that this man was my son.

"I could not dine and I retired to my room. It was a long time before I could sleep. Then sleep came, a sleep haunted with insupportable visions. I could see this ninny laughing in my face and calling me 'Papa.' Then he would change into a dog and bite me in the calf of my leg. In vain I tried to free myself, he would follow me always, and, instead of barking he would speak, abusing me. Then he would appear before my colleagues at the Academy, called together for the purpose of deciding whether I was his father. And one of them cried: 'It is indubitable! See how he resembles him!'

"And in fact, I perceived that the monster did resemble me. And I awoke with this idea fixed in my mind, and with a mad desire to see the man again and decide whether he did or did not have features in common with my own.

"I joined him as he was going to mass (it was on Sunday) and gave him a franc, scanning his face anxiously. He began to laugh in an ignoble fashion, took the money, then, again constrained by my eye, he fled, after having blurted out a word, almost inarticulate, which meant to say 'Thank you,' without doubt.

"That day passed for me in the same agony as the preceding. Toward evening I sent for the proprietor and, with great caution, precautions, and finesse, I told him that I had become interested in this poor being so abandoned by everybody and so deprived of everything, and that I wished to do something for him.

"The man replied: 'Oh, don't worry about him, sir. He wants nothing; you will only make trouble for yourself. I employ him to clean the stable, and it is all that he can do. For that, I feed him and he sleeps with the horses. He needs nothing more. If you have an old pair of trousers, give them to him, but they will be in pieces in a week.'

"I did not insist, but waited to see.

"The fellow returned that evening, horribly drunk, almost setting fire to the house, striking one of the horses a blow with a pickaxe, and finally went to sleep in the mud out in the rain, thanks to my generosity. They begged me, the next day, not to give him any more money. Liquor made him furious, and when he had two sous in his pocket he drank it. The innkeeper added: 'To give him money is to kill him.' This man had absolutely never had any money, save a few centimes thrown to him by travellers, and he knew no other destination for it but the ale-house.

"Then I passed some hours in my room with an open book which I made a pretence of reading, but without accomplishing anything except to look at this brute. My son! my son! I was trying to discover if he was anything like me. By dint of searching I believed I recognised some similar lines in the brow and about the nose. And I was immediately convinced of a resemblance which only different clothing and the hideous mane of the man disguised.

"I could not stay there very long without being suspected, and I set out with breaking heart, after having left with the innkeeper some money to ease the existence of his stable-boy.

"For six years I have lived with this thought, this horrible

uncertainty, this abominable doubt, and each year an irresistible force drags me back to Pont-Labbé. Each year I condemn myself to the torture of seeing this brute wallow in his filth, imagining that he resembles me, and of seeking, always in vain, to be helpful to him. And each year I come back more undecided, more tortured, more anxious.

"I have tried to have him educated, but he is an incurable idiot. I have tried to render life less painful to him, but he is an incurable drunkard and uses all the money that is given him for drink. And he knows very well how to sell his new clothes to get cognac.

"I have tried to arouse pity in his employer for him, that he might treat him more gently, always offering him money. The innkeeper, astonished, finally remarked very wisely: 'Everything you do for him, sir, will only ruin him. He must be kept like a prisoner. As soon as he has time given him or favours shown, he becomes vicious. If you wish to do good there are plenty of abandoned children. Choose one that will be worth your trouble.'

"What could I say to that?

"And if I should disclose a suspicion of the doubts which torture me, this brute would certainly turn rogue and exploit me, compromise me, ruin me. He would cry out to me: 'Papa,' as in my dream.

"And I tell myself that I have killed the mother and ruined this atrophied being, larva of the stable, born and bred on a dunghill, this man who, if he had been brought up as others are, might have been like others.

"And you cannot imagine the strange, confused, intolerable sensation I feel in his presence, as I think that this has come from me, that he belongs to me by that intimate bond which binds father to son, that, thanks to the terrible laws of heredity, he is a part of me in a thousand things, by his blood and his flesh, and that he has the same germs of sickness and the same ferments of passion.

“And I have always an unappeasable and painful desire to see him, and the sight of him makes me suffer horribly ; and from my window down there I look at him for hours as he pitchforks and carts away the dung of the beasts, repeating to myself : ‘ That is my son ! ’

“And I feel, sometimes, an intolerable desire to embrace him. But I have never even touched his filthy hand.”

The Academician was silent. And his companion, the politician, murmured : “ Yes, indeed ; we ought to think a little more about the children who have no father.”

Then a breath of wind came up, and the great tree shook its clusters, and enveloped with a fine, odorous cloud the two old men, who took long draughts of the sweet perfume.

And the senator added : “ It is fine to be twenty-five years old, and even to become a father like that.”

SAINT ANTHONY

HE WAS CALLED SAINT ANTHONY, BECAUSE HIS NAME WAS Anthony, and also, perhaps, because he was a good fellow, jovial, a lover of practical jokes, a tremendous eater and a heavy drinker and a great man for the servant girls, although he was sixty years old.

He was a big peasant of the district of Caux, with a red face, large chest and stomach, and perched on two long legs that seemed too slight for the bulk of his body.

He was a widower and lived alone with his two men-servants and a maid on his farm, which he ran with shrewd economy. He was careful of his own interests, understood business and the raising of cattle, and farming. His two sons and his three daughters, who had married well, were living in the neighbourhood and came to dine with their father once a month. His vigour of body was famous in all the country-side. "He is as strong as Saint Anthony," had become a kind of proverb.

At the time of the Prussian invasion Saint Anthony, at the wine shop, promised to eat an army, for he was a braggart, like a true Norman, and a bit of a coward and a blusterer. He banged his fist on the wooden table, making the cups and the brandy glasses dance, and cried with the exaggerated truculence of the good fellow, his face flushed and a sly look in his eye: "I shall have to eat some of them, *nom de Dieu!*" He reckoned that the Prussians would not come as far as Tanneville, but when he heard they were at Rautôt he never went out of the house, and constantly watched the road from the little window of his kitchen, expecting at any moment to see the bayonets go by.

One morning, as he was eating his midday meal with the

servants, the door opened and the mayor of the commune, Maître Chicot, appeared, followed by a soldier wearing a black helmet with a copper spike. Saint Anthony bounded to his feet and all his household looked at him, expecting to see him slash the Prussian. But he merely shook hands with the mayor, who said :

"Here is one for you, Saint Anthony. They came last night. Don't do anything foolish, above all things, for they talk of shooting and burning everything if there is the slightest unpleasantness. I have given you warning. Give him something to eat ; he looks like a good fellow. Good day. I am going to call on the rest. There are enough for all." And he went out.

Old Anthony, who had turned pale, looked at the Prussian. He was a big, young fellow, plump and fair-skinned, with blue eyes, fair hair, and hair on his face to his cheek-bones, who looked stupid, timid and good humoured. The shrewd Norman read him at once, and, reassured, he made him a sign to sit down. Then he said : " Will you have some soup ? "

The stranger did not understand. Anthony then became bolder, and pushing a plateful of soup right under his nose, he said : " Here, swallow that, you big pig ! "

The soldier answered " Ya," and began to eat greedily, while the farmer, triumphant, feeling he had regained his reputation, winked his eyes at the servants, who were making strange grimaces, what with their terror and their desire to laugh.

When the Prussian had devoured his plateful, Saint Anthony gave him another, which disappeared in like manner ; but he flinched at the third which the farmer tried to insist on his eating, saying : " Come, put that into your stomach ; we will fatten you or we'll know the reason why, you pig ! "

The soldier, understanding only that they wanted to make him eat all his soup, laughed in a contented manner, making a sign to show that he could not hold any more.

Then Saint Anthony, became quite familiar, tapped him on

the stomach, saying : " My, there is plenty in my pig's belly ! " But suddenly he began to writhe with laughter, unable to speak. An idea had struck him which made him choke with mirth. " That's it, that's it, Saint Anthony and his pig. There's my pig ! " And the three servants burst out laughing in their turn.

The old fellow was so pleased that he had the brandy brought in, good stuff, *fil en dix*, and treated every one. They clinked glasses with the Prussian, who clacked his tongue by way of flattery to show that he enjoyed it. And Saint Anthony exclaimed in his face : " Eh, is not that superfine ? You don't get anything like that in your home, pig ! "

From that time Father Anthony never went out without his Prussian. He had got what he wanted. This was his vengeance, the vengeance of an old humbug. And the whole country-side, which was in terror, laughed to split its sides at Saint Anthony's joke. Truly, there was no one like him when it came to humour. No one but he would have thought of a thing like that. He was a born joker !

He went to see his neighbours every day, arm in arm with his German, whom he introduced in a jovial manner, tapping him on the shoulder : " See, here is my pig ; look and see if he is not growing fat, the animal ! "

And the peasants would beam with smiles. " He is so comical, that fellow, Antoine ! "

" I will sell him to you, Cesaire, for thirty francs. "

" I will take him, Antoine, and I invite you to eat some black pudding. "

" What I want is his feet. "

" Feel his belly ; you will see that it is all fat. "

And they all winked at each other, but dared not laugh too loud, for fear the Prussian might finally suspect they were laughing at him. Anthony, alone growing bolder every day, pinched his thighs, exclaiming, " Nothing but fat " ; tapped his hips, shouting, " That is all bacon " ; lifted him up in his arms like

those of an old colossus who could have lifted an anvil, declaring, "He weighs six hundred and no waste."

He had got into the habit of making people offer his "pig" something to eat wherever they went together. This was the chief pleasure, the great diversion every day. "Give him whatever you please, he will swallow everything." And they offered the man bread and butter, potatoes, cold meat, chitterlings, which caused the remark, "Some of your own, and choice ones."

The soldier, stupid and gentle, ate from politeness, charmed at these attentions, making himself ill rather than refuse, and he was actually growing fat and his uniform becoming tight for him. This delighted Saint Anthony, who said: "You know, my pig, that we shall have to have another cage made for you."

They had, however, become the best friends in the world, and when the old fellow went to attend to his business in the neighbourhood the Prussian accompanied him for the simple pleasure of being with him.

The weather was severe; it was freezing hard. The terrible winter of 1870 seemed to bring all the plagues upon France at the same time.

Father Antoine, who made provision beforehand, and took advantage of every opportunity, foreseeing that manure would be scarce for the spring farming, bought from a neighbour who happened to be in need of money all that he had, and it was agreed that he should go every evening with his cart to get a load.

So every day at twilight he set out for the farm of Haules, half a league distant, always accompanied by his "pig." And each time it was great fun to feed the animal. All the neighbours ran over there as they would go to high mass on Sunday.

But the soldier began to suspect something, and when they laughed too loud he would roll his eyes uneasily, and sometimes they lighted up with anger.

One evening when he had eaten his fill he refused to swallow

another morsel, and attempted to rise to leave the table. But Saint Anthony stopped him by a turn of the wrist and, placing his two powerful hands on his shoulders, he sat him down again so roughly that the chair smashed under him.

A wild burst of laughter broke forth, and Anthony, beaming, picked up his pig, acted as though he were dressing his wounds, and exclaimed: "Since you will not eat, you shall drink, *nom de Dieu!*" And they went to the tavern to get some brandy.

The soldier rolled his wicked eyes, but he drank, nevertheless; he drank as long as they wanted him, and Saint Anthony kept up with him, to the great delight of his companions.

The Norman, red as a tomato, his eyes ablaze, filled up the glasses and clinked, saying: "Here's to you!" And the Prussian, without speaking a word, poured down one after another glassfuls of cognac.

It was a contest, a battle, a revenge! Who would drink the most, by God! They could neither of them stand any more when the bottle was emptied. But neither was conquered. They had tied, that was all. They would have to begin again the next day.

They went out staggering and started for home, walking beside the dung-cart, which was drawn along slowly by two horses.

Snow began to fall and the moonless night was sadly lighted by this dead whiteness on the plain. The men began to feel the cold, and this aggravated their intoxication. Saint Anthony, annoyed at not being the victor, amused himself by shoving his companion so as to make him fall over into the ditch. The other would dodge backwards, and each time he did he uttered some German expression in an angry tone, which made the peasant roar with laughter. Finally the Prussian lost his temper, and just as Anthony was rolling towards him he responded with such a terrific blow with his fist that the colossus staggered.

Then, excited by the brandy, the old man seized the young one round the waist, shook him for a few moments as he would

have done with a little child, and pitched him at random to the other side of the road. Then, satisfied with this piece of work, he crossed his arms and began to laugh afresh.

But the soldier picked himself up quickly, his head bare, his helmet having rolled off, and drawing his sword he rushed over to Father Anthony.

When he saw him coming the peasant seized his whip by the top of the handle, his big hollywood whip, straight, strong and supple as the sinew of an ox.

The Prussian approached, his head down, making a lunge with his sword, sure of killing his adversary. But the old fellow, squarely hitting the blade, the point of which would have pierced his stomach, turned it aside, and with a butt-end of the whip struck the soldier a sharp blow on the temple and he fell to the ground.

Then he gazed aghast, stupefied with amazement, at the body, twitching convulsively at first and then lying prone and motionless. He bent over it, turned it on its back, and gazed at it for some time. The man's eyes were closed, and blood trickled from a wound at the side of his forehead. Although it was night, Father Anthony could distinguish the bloodstain on the white snow.

He remained there, at his wits' end, while his cart continued slowly on its way.

What was he to do? He would be shot! They would burn his farm, ruin his district! What should he do? What should he do? How could he hide the body, conceal the fact of his death, deceive the Prussians? He heard voices in the distance, amid the utter stillness of the snow. All at once he roused himself, and picking up the helmet he placed it on his victim's head. Then, seizing him round the body, he lifted him up in his arms, and thus running with him, he overtook his team, and threw the body on top of the manure. Once in his own house he would think up some plan.

He walked slowly, racking his brain, but without result.

He saw, he felt, that he was lost. He entered his courtyard. A light was shining in one of the attic windows; his servant was not asleep. He hastily backed his wagon to the edge of the manure hollow. He thought that by overturning the manure the body lying on top of it would fall into the ditch and be buried beneath it, and he dumped the cart.

As he had foreseen, the man was buried beneath the manure. Anthony evened it down with his fork, which he stuck in the ground beside it. He called his stableman, told him to put up the horses, and went to his room.

He went to bed, still thinking of what he had best do, but no ideas came to him. His apprehension increased in the quiet of his room. They would shoot him! He was bathed in perspiration from fear, his teeth chattered, he rose shivering, not being able to stay in bed.

He went downstairs to the kitchen, took the bottle of brandy from the sideboard and carried it upstairs. He drank two large glasses, one after another, adding a fresh intoxication to the late one, without quieting his mental anguish. He had done a pretty stroke of work, by God! Idiot that he was!

He paced up and down, trying to think of some stratagem, some explanations, some cunning trick, and from time to time he rinsed his mouth with a swallow of *fil en dix* to give him courage.

But no ideas came to him, not one.

Towards midnight his watch-dog, a kind of half wolf called "Dévorant," began to howl frantically. Father Anthony shuddered to the marrow of his bones, and each time the beast began his long and lugubrious wail the old man's skin turned to goose-flesh.

He had sunk into a chair, his legs weak, stupefied, done up, waiting anxiously for Dévorant to set up another howl, and starting convulsively from nervousness caused by terror.

The clock downstairs struck five. The dog was still howling. The peasant was almost insane. He rose to go and let the dog

loose, so that he should not hear him. He went downstairs, opened the hall door, and stepped out into the darkness. The snow was still falling. The earth was all white, the farm buildings standing out like black patches. He approached the kennel. The dog was dragging at his chain. He unfastened it. Dévorant gave a bound, then stopped short, his hair bristling, his legs rigid, his muzzle in the air, his nose pointed towards the manure heap.

Saint Anthony, trembling from head to foot, faltered :

"What's the matter with you, you dirty hound?" and he walked a few steps forward, gazing at the indistinct outlines, the sombre shadow of the courtyard.

Then he saw a form, the form of a man sitting on the manure heap!

He gazed at it, paralysed by fear, and breathing hard. But all at once he saw, close by, the handle of the manure fork which was sticking in the ground. He snatched it up and in one of those transports of fear that will make the greatest coward brave he rushed forward to see what it was.

It was he, his Prussian, come to life, covered with filth from his bed of manure, which had kept him warm. He had sat down mechanically, and remained there in the snow which sprinkled down, all covered with dirt and blood as he was, and still stupid from drinking, dazed by the blow and exhausted from his wound.

He perceived Anthony, and too sodden to understand anything, he made an attempt to rise. But the moment the old man recognised him, he foamed with rage like a wild animal.

"Ah, pig! pig!" he sputtered. "You are not dead! You are going to denounce me now—wait—wait!"

And rushing on the German with all the strength of his arms he flung the raised fork like a lance and buried the four prongs full length in his breast.

The soldier fell over on his back, uttering a long death moan, while the old peasant, drawing the fork out of his breast, plunged

it over and over again into his abdomen, his stomach, his throat, like a madman, piercing the body from head to foot, as it still quivered, and the blood gushed out in streams.

Finally he stopped, exhausted by the violence of his labours, swallowing great mouthfuls of air, calmed down by the completion of the murder.

As the cocks were beginning to crow in the poultry yard and it was near daybreak, he set to work to bury the man.

He dug a hole in the manure till he reached the earth, dug down further, working wildly, in a frenzy of strength with frantic motions of his arms and body.

When the pit was deep enough he rolled the corpse into it with the fork, covered it with earth, which he stamped down for some time, and then put back the manure, and he smiled as he saw the thick snow finishing his work and covering up its traces with a white sheet.

He then stuck the fork in the manure and went into the house. His bottle, still half full of brandy, stood on the table. He emptied it at a draught, threw himself on his bed and slept heavily.

He woke up sober, his mind calm and clear, capable of judgment and forethought.

At the end of an hour he was going about the country making inquiries everywhere for his soldier. He went to see the Prussian officer to find out why they had taken away his man.

As every one knew what good friends they were, no one suspected him. He even directed the search, declaring that the Prussian went to see the girls every evening.

An old retired gendarme who had an inn in the next village, and a pretty daughter, was arrested and shot.

WALTER SCHNAFFS' ADVENTURE

SINCE HIS ENTRANCE INTO FRANCE, WITH THE ARMY OF THE invasion, Walter Schnaffs judged himself the most unfortunate of men. He was stout, walked with difficulty, puffed much, and suffered frightfully with his feet, which were very broad and fat. Outwardly, he seemed peaceful and benevolent, neither brave nor bloodthirsty, the father of four children whom he adored, and married to a young, blonde woman whose caresses and cares and tenderness he desperately regretted every evening. He loved to rise late and go to bed early, to eat slowly of good things and drink beer in cafés. He felt that all that was sweet in existence disappeared with this life; and he had at heart a terrible fear and hatred, both instinctive and reasonable, of cannons, guns, revolvers, and swords, and especially of bayonets, feeling himself incapable of manœuvring rapidly enough to defend his great body with such a weapon.

And, when night had come and he had lain down to sleep upon the earth, wrapped in his blanket, by the side of his comrades, who were snoring, he thought long of his home, left behind him in Germany, and of the dangers sown all along the route. "If I should be killed what would become of the little ones?" he thought. "Who would feed them and bring them up?" At that very moment they were not rich, in spite of the debts he had contracted before he started, in order to leave them a little money. And sometimes Walter Schnaffs wept.

At the beginning of a battle he felt his knees growing so weak that he would have fallen had he not known that the whole army would pass over his body. The whistling of the bullets made his hair stand on end. For some months he lived thus, in terror and in anguish.

His army-corps was advancing toward Normandy. One day he was sent out to reconnoitre with a small detachment which was simply to explore a part of the country and report immediately. All seemed calm in the country; nothing indicated a prepared resistance.

The Prussians were descending quietly into a little valley divided by deep ravines, when a violent fusillade stopped them short, laying low one in twenty of their men; and a company of sharpshooters, coming out suddenly from a little wood, plunged forward with their bayonets fixed.

Walter Schnaffs remained motionless at first, so surprised and dismayed that he did not even think of fleeing. Then a foolish desire to run away seized him; but he thought immediately that he could run only like a tortoise in comparison with the thin Frenchmen, who were coming on in leaps and bounds, like a troop of goats. Then, perceiving but six steps before him a large ditch full of brushwood covered with dead leaves, he jumped in with both feet, without even thinking how deep it was, as one might jump from a bridge into a river. He went like a dart, through a thick layer of creepers and sharp twigs, which tore his face and hands as he fell, and found himself seated heavily on a bed of stones. Raising his eyes, he could see the sky through the hole that he had made. This hole might lead to his discovery, and he dragged himself along cautiously, on all fours, at the bottom of this ditch, under a roof of enlaced branches, going with all speed possible as far as he could from the combat. Then he stopped and seated himself, crouching like a hare in the midst of the tall dry grass.

For some time longer he heard the reports of the guns and the cries of the wounded, then the clamour of the struggle grew feebler and finally ceased. All became still and calm.

Suddenly something moved near him. He had a fearful shock. It was a little bird, which, standing upon a branch, had shaken the dry leaves. For nearly an hour, the man's heart beat with heavy, rapid strokes.

Night came on, filling the ravine with shadows. The soldier began to think. What was he going to do? What would become of him? Should he rejoin his regiment? But how? And where? Was it necessary to begin over again the life of anguish, of fear, of fatigue and suffering that he had led since the beginning of the war? No! He would never have the courage. He would never have the energy necessary to support the marches and confront the dangers of each minute.

But what was to be done? He could not remain in this ravine and conceal himself there until the end of hostilities. Certainly not. If he were not obliged to eat, this prospect might not have deterred him; but he must eat and eat every day.

Thus he found himself alone, under arms, in uniform, in the enemy's territory, far from those able to defend him. Cold shivers ran through his body. Suddenly he thought: "If only I were a prisoner!" And his heart trembled with the desire, a violent, immoderate desire to be made prisoner by the French. He would be safely lodged and fed, under shelter from bullets and swords, without possible apprehension, in a good prison well guarded. A prisoner! What a dream!

His resolution was made immediately: "I will go and give myself up as a prisoner." He got up resolved to execute his project without a minute's delay. But he remained there, suddenly assailed by cowardly reflections and new fears.

Where should he go to give himself up? And how? On which side? And frightful images of death invaded his soul. He might run some terrible dangers in venturing out alone through the country in his metal-pointed helmet. If he should meet some country people? These peasants, seeing a Prussian soldier lost, a defenceless Prussian, would kill him like a stray dog! They would murder him, with their forks, their pickaxes, their scythes, their shovels! They would reduce him to pulp and make mincemeat of him with the savagery of exasperated conquerors.

And if he should meet some sharpshooters? These madmen, without law or discipline, would shoot him to amuse themselves, to pass away an hour, for the fun of seeing his face. And he could already imagine himself against a wall, facing a dozen gun barrels, whose little round, black holes seemed to be looking at him.

And if he should meet the French army? The advance guard would take him for a spy, for some brave and hardy rogue of a trooper sent out alone to reconnoitre, and would shoot him down at once. And he could already hear the irregular reports of the guns of soldiers concealed in the woods, while he, standing in the middle of a field, would be riddled with bullets like a strainer, and he could feel them entering his flesh. He sat down again in despair. His situation appeared to be hopeless.

Night had now come, night still and dark. He no longer moved, and started at every unknown and slight noise which passed in the shadows. A rabbit, bobbing up and down on the edge of his burrow, almost put Walter Schnaffs to flight. The cries of the screech-owl tore his soul, rending it with sudden fear, as painful as wounds. He started with his big eyes, trying to penetrate the shadows; and he imagined every moment that he heard someone walking near him.

After interminable hours and the anguish of the damned, he perceived through his ceiling of branches that the sky was becoming bright. Then immense relief came to him; his members relaxed in sudden repose; his heart was easy; his eyes closed. He fell asleep.

When he awoke, the sun seemed to him to be nearly in the middle of the sky; it should, therefore, be midday. No noise troubled the dull peace of the fields; and Walter Schnaffs perceived that he was seized with acute hunger. He yawned, his mouth watering at the thought of sausage, the good military sausage, and he got a pain in his stomach.

He stood up, took some steps, felt that his legs were feeble

and sat down again to think. For three or four hours more he argued for and against, changing his mind every moment, unhappy, drawn this way and that by the most contradictory arguments.

One idea seemed to him logical and practical: that was to watch until some villager passed, alone, without arms or dangerous tools, to run up to him and deliver himself into his hands, making him understand that he was giving himself up. Then he removed his helmet, the point of which might betray him, and put his head out of his hole with infinite precautions.

No single human being was in sight. Down there, to the right, a little village sent to the sky the smoke from its roofs, the smoke from its kitchens! To the left, he perceived at the end of an avenue of trees, a great castle flanked with turrets. He waited until evening, suffering frightfully, seeing nothing but flocks of crows, and hearing nothing but the dull rumbling of his stomach.

Again the night fell upon him. He stretched himself out at the bottom of his retreat and fell into a feverish sleep, haunted by nightmares, the sleep of a famished man. The dawn again rose upon him. He again set himself to watch, but the countryside was as empty as the day before. And a new fear entered the mind of Walter Schnaffs—the fear of dying of hunger. He saw himself stretched at the bottom of that hole, on his back, his eyes closed. Then some animals, small animals of every sort, would come and begin to eat his dead body, attacking him everywhere simultaneously, slipping in under his garments to bite his cold flesh. And a great raven would pick his eyes out with its sharp beak.

Then he became mad, imagining that he was swooning from weakness and could no longer walk. And he prepared to start toward the village, resolved to dare all, to defy all; but he perceived three peasants going to the fields with their forks on their shoulders, and he plunged back into his hiding-place.

When evening darkened the plain again, he got out slowly

from the ditch, and started on the way, crouching, fearful, his heart beating, towards the far-off castle, preferring to enter that rather than the village, which seemed to him as dangerous as a den of tigers.

The lower windows were brilliantly lighted, one of them being open ; and a strong odour of food, cooked food, came from it, entering Walter Schnaffs' nostrils and penetrating to the depths of his body, causing his body to become tense and his breath to come in gasps. It drew him irresistibly, inspiring his heart with desperate audacity. And suddenly, without thinking, he appeared at the window with his helmet on his head.

Eight servants were dining around a big table. Suddenly a maid sat still with her mouth open, letting her glass fall, her eyes staring. Then, every glance followed hers.

They perceived the enemy ! My God ! The Prussians are attacking the castle !

At first this was a single cry, made up of eight cries in eight different tones, a cry of horrible fear, then there was a tumultuous moving, a hustling, a *mêlée*, a general flight for the farthest door. Chairs fell, men knocked over the women to get ahead of them. In two seconds the room was empty, abandoned, with a table covered with eatables in front of Walter Schnaffs, who stood still in amazement outside the window.

After some moments of hesitation, he jumped over the window-sill, and advanced towards the plates. His keen hunger made him tremble like one in a fever ; but terror still held him and paralysed him. He listened. The whole house seemed to tremble ; doors opened and shut, and rapid steps sounded on the floor above. The uneasy Prussian strained his ears to catch these confused noises ; then he heard heavy sounds as if bodies were falling in the soft earth at the foot of the walls, human bodies jumping from the first story.

Then all movement, all agitation ceased, and the great castle became silent as a tomb.

Walter Schnaffs seated himself before a plate still intact, and began to eat. He ate with great mouthfuls as if he feared being interrupted too soon, before he had devoured enough. He threw the pieces with both hands into his mouth, opened like a trap; huge pieces of food descended into his stomach, one after the other, straining his throat in passing. Sometimes he interrupted himself, feeling ready to burst, like an over-filled pipe. He took the cider pitcher and poured its contents down his throat, as one washes out a stopped-up conduit.

He emptied all the plates, all the dishes, and all the bottles; then, full of liquid and eatables, besotted, red, shaking with hiccoughs, his mouth greasy, his mind troubled, he unbuttoned his uniform in order to breathe, incapable of taking another step. His eyes closed, his ideas became vague; he dropped his heavy head in his crossed arms on the table, and sweetly lost all consciousness of his surroundings.

The waning crescent lighted the horizon vaguely through the trees of the park. It was the cold hour which precedes the day. Sometimes a ray of the moon glittered like a point of steel among the shadows of the thicket.

The quiet castle appeared like a great, black silhouette against the clear sky. Two windows alone on the ground floor were still brilliantly lighted. Suddenly, a voice of thunder cried:

"Forward! To the assault! Come on, boys!"

Then, in an instant, the doors, shutters, even the windows, were broken down by the rush of men who dashed forward, breaking and overturning all in their way, invading the house. In an instant, fifty men, armed to the teeth, bounded into the kitchen where Walter Schnaffs was peacefully sleeping; and, presenting to his breast their loaded guns, they seized him, rolled him over, threw him down, and bound him hand and foot.

He was breathless with astonishment, too dazed to under-

stand, beaten, battered and mad with terror. Suddenly a fat military-looking man, covered with gold lace, planted his foot upon his body, calling out vociferously :

"You are my prisoner ! Surrender !"

The Prussian understood only the single word "prisoner," and groaned : "Ja, ja, ja !"

He was taken up, bound to a chair, and examined with a lively curiosity by his conquerors, who were puffing like porpoises. Many of them sat down, overcome by emotion and fatigue.

He smiled ; he could smile now, sure at last of being a prisoner !

An officer entered and announced :

"Colonel, the enemy is put to flight. Many of them appear to have been wounded. We are now masters of the place."

The fat officer, wiping his brow, shouted : "Victory !" And, drawing a little notebook from his pocket, he wrote :

"After a desperate struggle, the Prussians had to beat a retreat, taking their dead and wounded with them, estimated at about fifty men. Several remain in our hands."

The young officer inquired : "Colonel, what measures are to be taken ?"

The Colonel replied : "We shall fall back in order to avoid a resumption of the offensive with artillery and superior forces."

The column re-formed in the shadow under the wall of the castle, and set off, surrounding, with great care, Walter Schnaffs, bound, and guarded by six warriors with revolvers in hand. Scouts were sent out to reconnoitre the route. They advanced with great care, halting from time to time. At daylight, they arrived at the Sub-prefect's, in La Roche-Oysel, whose National Guards had accomplished this feat of arms.

The people of the town, anxious and excited, awaited them.

When they saw the prisoner's helmet fearful shouts arose. Women lifted up their hands, old people wept, a grandfather threw his crutch at the Prussian and wounded the nose of one of his guards. The Colonel shouted: "Look out for the safety of the prisoner!"

Finally, they came to the Town Hall. The prison was opened, and Walter Schnaffs was thrown in, freed from his fetters. Two hundred men, in arms, mounted guard on the building.

Then, in spite of the symptoms of indigestion which had been troubling him for some time, the Prussian, mad with joy, began to dance, to dance madly, raising his arms and legs and uttering frenzied cries, until he fell exhausted against the wall. He was a prisoner! He was saved.

And thus it was that the castle of Champignnet was retaken from the enemy after only six hours of occupation.

Colonel Ratier, cloth merchant, who accomplished this feat at the head of the National Guards of La Roche-Oysel, was decorated for it.

THE TOMB

ON THE SEVENTEENTH OF JULY, EIGHTEEN HUNDRED AND eighty-three, at half-past two o'clock in the morning, the caretaker of Béziers cemetery, who lived in a little house at the end of the burying-ground, was awakened by the yelping of his dog, which was locked in the kitchen.

He immediately went downstairs, and saw that the animal was scenting something under the door and barking furiously, as though some tramp had been prowling about the house. Vincent, the caretaker, took up his gun and went out cautiously.

His dog ran off in the direction of General Bonner's Avenue and stopped short in front of Madam Tomoiseau's monument.

The caretaker, advancing cautiously, soon noticed a dim light in the direction of Malenvers Avenue. He slipped in amongst the tombstones and witnessed a most horrible deed of desecration.

A young man had disinterred the corpse of a young woman, buried the day before, and he was dragging it out of the grave.

A small dark lantern, placed on a pile of earth, lit up this hideous scene.

Vincent, the caretaker, pounced upon the criminal, felled him to the ground, bound his hands and took him to the police station.

He was a young lawyer from the city, rich and well thought of. His name was Courbataille.

He was tried. The public prosecutor recalled the monstrous deeds committed by Sergeant Bertrand, and aroused the audience.

The crowd was thrilled with indignation. As soon as the magistrate sat down the cry arose: "Put him to death! Put

him to death ! ” The president had great difficulty in restoring silence.

Then he said, in a serious tone of voice :

“ Accused, what have you to say in your defence ? ”

Courbataille, who had refused counsel, arose. He was a handsome youth, large, dark, with an open countenance, strong features, and a fearless eye.

The crowd began to hiss.

He was not disconcerted, but commenced speaking with a slightly husky voice, a little low in the beginning, but gradually gaining in strength :

“ Your Honour,

“ Gentlemen of the Jury,

“ I have very little to say. The woman whose tomb I violated was my mistress. I loved her.

“ I loved her, not with a sensual love, not simply from kindness of soul and heart, but with an absolute, perfect love, with mad passion.

“ Listen to what I have to say :

“ When I first met her, I felt a strange sensation on seeing her. It was not astonishment, nor admiration, for it was not what is called love at first sight, but it was a delightful sensation, as though I had been plunged in a tepid bath. Her movements captivated me, her voice enchanted me, it gave me infinite pleasure to watch everything about her. It also seemed to me that I had known her for a long time, that I had seen her before. She seemed to have some of my spirit within her.

“ She seemed to me like an answer to an appeal from my soul, to this vague and continuous appeal which forces us toward Hope throughout the whole course of our lives.

“ When I became a little better acquainted with her, the mere thought of seeing her again filled me with a deep and exquisite agitation ; the touch of her hand in mine was such a joy to me that I had never imagined the like before ; her

smile made my eyes shine with joy, and made me feel like running about, dancing, rolling on the ground.

"Then she became my mistress.

"She was more than that to me, she was my life itself. I hoped for nothing more on earth, I wished for nothing more, I longed for nothing more.

"Well, one evening, as we were taking a rather long walk by the bank of the stream, we were caught by the rain. She felt cold.

"The next day she had inflammation of the lungs. Eight days later she died.

"During those dying hours, astonishment and fear prevented me from understanding or thinking.

"When she was dead, I was so stunned by brutal despair that I was unable to think. I wept.

"During all the horrible phases of interment my wild, excessive grief was the sorrow of a man beside himself, a sort of sensual physical grief.

"Then when she was gone, when she was under the ground, my mind suddenly became clear, and I passed through a train of mental suffering so terrible that even the love she had given me was dear at such a price.

"Then I was seized with an obsession.

"I shall never see her again.

"After reflecting on that for a whole day, it maddens you.

"Think of it! A being is there, one whom you adore, a unique being, for in the whole wide world there is no one who resembles her. This being has given herself to you, with you she creates this mysterious union called love. Her glance seems to you vaster than space, more charming than the world, her bright glance full of tender smiles. This being loves you. When she speaks to you her voice overwhelms you with happiness.

"And suddenly she disappears! Think of it! She disappears not only from your sight, but from everybody's.

She is dead. Do you understand what that word means? Never, never, never more, nowhere, will this being exist. Those eyes will never see again. Never will this voice, never will any voice like this, among human voices, pronounce one word in the same way that she pronounced it.

"There will never be another face born like hers. Never, never! The cast of statues is kept; the stamp that reproduces objects with the same outlines and the same colours is preserved. But this body and this face will never be seen again on this earth. And still there will be born thousands of beings, millions, thousands of millions, and even more, and among all these women there will never be found one like her. Can that be possible? It makes one mad to think of it!

"She lived twenty years, no more, and she has disappeared forever, forever, forever! She thought, she smiled, she loved me. Now there is nothing more. The flies which die in the autumn are of as much importance as we in creation. Nothing more! And I thought how her body, her fresh, warm body, so soft, so white, so beautiful, was rotting away in the depths of a box under the ground. And her soul, her mind, her love—where were they?

"Never to see her again! Never again! My mind was haunted by the thought of that decomposing body, which I, however, might still recognise!

"I set out with a shovel, a lantern and a hammer. I climbed over the cemetery wall. I found the hole where her grave was. It had not yet been entirely filled up. I uncovered the coffin, and raised one of the planks. An awful odour, the abominable breath of putrefaction, arose in my face. Oh, her bed, perfumed with iris!

"However, I opened the coffin and thrust in my lighted lantern, and saw her. Her face was blue, swollen, horrible! Black liquid had flowed from her mouth.

"She! It was she! I was seized with horror. But I put out my arm and caught her hair to pull this monstrous

face towards me! It was at that moment I was arrested.

"All night I carried with me, as one retains the perfume of a woman after a sexual embrace, the filthy smell of this putrefaction, the odour of my beloved!

"Do what you like with me."

A strange silence seemed to hang over the hall. People appeared to be awaiting something more. The Jury withdrew to deliberate. When they returned after a few minutes, the accused did not seem to have any fears, nor even any thoughts. In the traditional formula the Judge informed him that his peers had found him not guilty.

He did not make a movement, but the public applauded.

A TRAVELLER'S NOTES

SEVEN O'CLOCK. A WHISTLE BLOWS; WE ARE OFF. THE train passes over the turnplates with the noise of stage thunder, then it plunges into the night, panting, puffing up its steam, throwing gleams of red light on passing walls, hedges, woods, and fields.

We are six, three on each seat, under the light of the lamp. Opposite me is a stout lady with a stout gentleman, an old married couple. A hunchback sits in the left corner; beside me is a young married pair, or, at least, a young couple! Are they married? The young woman is pretty and seems modest, but she smells too strongly of perfume. What kind of perfume is it? I know it without being able to name it. Ah! now I've got it. *Peau d'Espagne*? That tells nothing. Let us wait and see.

The stout lady looks at the young woman with an air of hostility which sets me to thinking. The stout gentleman closes his eyes. Already! The hunchback has rolled himself up into a ball. I no longer see where his legs are. One sees nothing but his bright eye under a skull-cap with a red tassel. Then he shrinks into his travelling-shawl. He looks like a small parcel thrown down on the seat.

The old lady alone stays awake, suspicious, uneasy, like a watchman whose duty it is to guard the order and morality of the occupants of the carriage.

The young people do not move; their knees are under the same shawl, and their eyes are open, but they do not speak; are they married?

I also pretend to sleep, and watch.

Nine o'clock. The stout lady is about to give in, she closes her eyes spasmodically, and her head drops on her breast, but she lifts it up again by fits and starts. Then at last she goes to sleep.

O sleep! ridiculous mystery which makes faces appear so grotesque, you are the revealer of human ugliness. You uncover all shortcomings, all deformities and all defects. You turn every face touched by you into a caricature.

I rise and put the light-blue shade over the lamp, and then I also go to sleep.

Every now and then the stopping of the train awakens me. An employee calls out the name of a town, and then we go on.

Here is the dawn. We are running alongside the Rhône, which is going down to the Mediterranean. Everybody is sleeping. The young people have their arms around each other. One of the feet of the young woman is peeping under the shawl. She is wearing white stockings! That is commonplace: they are married! The air is not fresh in the compartment, and I open a window to change it. The cold coming in awakens every one, except the hunchback, who is snoring under his cover.

The ugliness of the faces becomes more accentuated in the light of the new day.

The stout lady, with red face and untidy hair, looks awful. She glances around spitefully at her neighbours. The young woman looks smilingly at her companion. If she were not married she would have first looked at her mirror.

Here we are at Marseilles. Twenty minutes' stop. I breakfast. We go on. The hunchback is missing, and we have, instead, two old gentlemen.

Then the two married couples, the old and the young, unpack their provisions. A chicken here, cold veal there, pepper and salt in paper, pickles in a handkerchief—everything to make you disgusted with food for ever. I know nothing

more common, more vulgar, more out of place, and more ill-bred than to eat in a carriage where there are other passengers.

If it is freezing, open the windows. If it is hot, close them and smoke your pipe, even if you detest tobacco; begin to sing, to bark, indulge in the most annoying eccentricities, take off your shoes and stockings and pare your toe-nails; in short, pay these ill-bred people in their own coin for their lack of good manners.

The far-sighted man will carry a bottle of benzine or petrol to sprinkle on the cushions when the people beside him begin to eat. Everything is permitted, anything is too good for the boors who poison you with the odour of their food.

Now we are running beside the blue sea. The sun beats down upon the coast dotted with charming towns.

Here is Saint-Raphaël. Yonder is Saint-Tropez, the little capital of that deserted, unknown, and delightful country called the Mountains of the Moors. A broad river not spanned by any bridge, the Argens, separates this wild peninsula from the continent, and one can walk there for a whole day without meeting a soul. Here the villages, perched upon the mountains, are the same as they were in former times, with their Oriental houses, their arcades, their low-vaulted doors ornamented with sculpture.

No railroad, no public conveyance penetrates into these splendid wooded valleys. Only an old mail-boat carries the letters from Hyères and Saint-Tropez.

On we go. Here is Cannes, so pretty on the shore of its two gulfs, opposite the islands of Lérins, which would make two perfect paradises for the sick, if they could be connected with the mainland.

Here is the Gulf of Juan; the armoured squadron seems to lie asleep on the water.

Here is Nice. There is apparently an exhibition in the town. Let us go to see it.

Following a boulevard, which seems like a marsh, we reach

a building on an elevation, in doubtful taste, which seems a miniature replica of the great palace of the Trocadéro.

Inside there are some people walking about in the midst of a chaos of boxes. The Exhibition, which has been open for a long time, will doubtless be ready next year!

It would be attractive inside if it were finished. But it is far from that.

Two sections especially attract me: that of the comestibles and that of the Fine Arts. Alas! there really are preserved fruits of Grasse here, and a thousand other good things to eat. But—it is forbidden to sell them! One may only look at them! And that is so as not to injure the trade of the town! To exhibit sweetmeats for the mere pleasure of looking at them, and forbid anybody to taste them, really seems to be one of the finest inventions of the human mind.

The Fine Arts are—in preparation! Yet some halls are open, where one may see very fine landscapes by Harpignies, Guillemet, Le Poittevin, a superb portrait of Mademoiselle Alice Regnault by Courtois, a delightful Béraud, etc. As for the rest—when they are unpacked!

As one must see everything on visiting a place, I will treat myself to an air trip in the balloon of MM. Godard and Company.

The mistral is blowing. The balloon is swaying in an uneasy way. Suddenly there is an explosion; the cords of the net have broken. The public is forbidden to come within the inclosure, and I also am turned out.

I climb upon my carriage and survey the scene.

Every moment another rope snaps with a singular noise, and the brown skin of the balloon attempts to rise from the meshes that hold it. Then suddenly, under a more violent gust of wind, there is an immense tear from top to bottom of the great ball, which falls together like a limp cloth, torn and dead.

The next morning on awakening I call for the newspapers and read with astonishment:

"The tempest now raging on our coast has compelled the management of the captive and free balloons of Nice to empty its great aerostat, in order to avoid accidents. The system of instantaneous emptying used by M. Godard is one of his inventions that redound most to his honour."

Oh Oh! Oh! Oh, the dear public!

The entire coast of the Mediterranean is the El Dorado of the chemists. One must be ten times a millionaire to dare purchase even a simple box of cough-drops from these haughty merchants, who ask the price of diamonds for their jujubes.

One can go from Nice to Monaco via La Corniche, along the sea-coast. There is nothing more charming than this road cut in the rock, which skirts gulfs, passes under arches, and turns and twists along the mountain through wonderful country.

Here is Monaco on its rock, and behind it Monte Carlo. Hush! I can understand how those who like to gamble adore this pretty little town. But how sombre and sad it is for those who do not gamble! There is no other pleasure, no other attraction.

Farther on is Mentone, the hottest place on the coast, and the one most frequented by invalids. There oranges ripen and consumptives are cured.

I take the night train to return to Cannes. In my compartment there are two ladies and a man from Marseilles who is determined to tell stories of railway accidents, murders, and thefts.

"I once knew a Corsican, Madame, who came to Paris with his son. I speak of long ago, in the early days of the P. L. M. Railway. I joined them, since we were friends, and off we went.

"The son, who was twenty years old, was utterly amazed at the running of the train, and stood leaning out of the window all the time to watch it. His father kept repeating to him: 'Heh! Take care, Mathéo! Don't lean out too far, or you may hurt yourself.' But the boy did not even answer.

"I said to the father :

" ' Let him do it, if it amuses him.'

" But the father repeated :

" ' Come now, Mathéo, don't lean out like that.'

" Then, as the son did not answer, he took him by the coat to make him come back into the carriage, and gave it a pull. And then the body fell back on our knees. He was minus his head, Madame, for it had been cut off by a tunnel. And the neck was not even bleeding any longer ; all the blood had flowed along the line."

One of the ladies heaved a sigh, closed her eyes, and sank upon her neighbour. She had fainted.

IN THE MOONLIGHT

THE ABBÉ MARIGNAN WELL DESERVED TO BE NAMED AFTER that famous battle. He was a tall, thin, fanatical priest, always in a state of exaltation, but never unjust. All his beliefs were fixed, and they never wavered. He sincerely believed that he understood God, that he penetrated His designs, His wishes, His intentions.

As he walked up and down the garden path of his little country presbytery a question sometimes arose in his mind: "Why did God do that?" Then, imagining himself in God's place, he searched obstinately, and he nearly always found the reason. He was not the man to murmur in transports of pious humility, "O Lord, Thy designs are inscrutable!" What he said was: "I am the servant of God; I ought to know the reason for what He does, or to divine it if I do not."

Everything in nature seemed to him created with an absolute and admirable logic. The "why" and the "wherefore" always balanced. The dawns were made to rejoice you on waking, the days to ripen the harvests, the rains to water them, the evenings to prepare for sleeping, and the nights dark for sleep.

The four seasons answered perfectly all the requirements of agriculture; and to him the suspicion could never have come that nature has no intention, and that everything that lives has accustomed itself, on the contrary, to the harsh necessities of different periods, of climates, and of matter.

But he hated women; he hated them unconsciously, and despised them by instinct. He often repeated the words of Christ, "Woman, what have I to do with thee?" and he would add, "One would almost say that God Himself was ill-pleased

with that particular work of His hands." Woman for him was indeed the "child twelve times impure" of whom the poet speaks. She was the temptress who had ensnared the first man, and who still continued her damnable work; she was the being who is feeble, dangerous, mysteriously disturbing. And even more than her fatal body, he hated her loving soul.

He had often felt women's tenderness dwell in him, and though he knew himself to be unassailable, he grew exasperated at this need of loving which quivers continually in their hearts.

To his mind, God had only created woman to tempt man and to test him. Man should not approach her without defensive precautions, and such fears as one has of an ambush. Woman, indeed, was just like a trap, with her arms extended and her lips open toward a man.

He had toleration only for nuns, rendered harmless by their vows, but he treated them harshly notwithstanding, because, at the bottom of their locked hearts, their chastened hearts, he perceived still the eternal tenderness that constantly went out even to him, although he was a priest. He felt that tenderness in their eyes more filled with the ecstasies of piety than those of the monks, in their ecstasies touched with sex, in their loving yearning for Christ, which made him indignant, because it was woman's love, carnal love. He felt that accursed tenderness even in their submissiveness, in the softness of their voices as they spoke to him, in their downcast eyes, and in their tears of resignation when he harshly reproved them. And he would shake the skirts of his cassock on coming out of a convent, and would stride off rapidly, as if in flight from danger.

He had a niece who lived with her mother in a little house near by. He was bent on making her a sister of charity. She was pretty and hare-brained, and a great tease. When the Abbé sermonised, she laughed; when he was angry at her, she kissed him vehemently, pressing him to her heart, while he would seek involuntarily to free himself from her embrace,

though it made him taste a certain sweet joy, awaking deep within him that sensation of fatherhood which slumbers in every man.

Often he talked to her of God, of his God, walking beside her along the footpaths through the fields. She hardly listened, but looked at the sky, the grass, the flowers, with a joy of living which could be seen in her eyes. Sometimes she rushed forward to catch some flying creature, and, bringing it back, would cry: "Look, uncle, how pretty it is; I should like to kiss it." And this desire to "kiss flies" or bunches of lilac, worried, irritated, and revolted the priest, who saw, also in that, the ineradicable tenderness which ever springs in the hearts of women.

One day the sacristan's wife, who kept house for the Abbé Marignan, told him, very cautiously, that his niece had a lover!

He experienced a dreadful emotion, and stood choking, with the soap all over his face, for he was shaving.

When he found himself able to think and speak once more, he cried: "It is not true; you are lying, Mélanie!"

But the peasant woman placed her hand on her heart: "May our Lord judge me if I am lying, Monsieur le Curé. I tell you she goes to him every evening as soon as your sister is in bed. They meet each other beside the river. You have only to go there between ten o'clock and midnight, and see for yourself."

He ceased scraping his chin and began to pace the room rapidly, as he always did in his hours of serious meditation. When he tried to begin his shaving again, he cut himself three times from nose to ear.

All day long, he remained silent, filled with indignation and rage. To his priestly zeal against the mighty power of love was added the moral indignation of a father, of a teacher, of a keeper of souls, who has been deceived, robbed, outwitted by a child. He felt the egotistical sorrow that parents feel when their daughter announces that she has chosen a husband without them and in spite of their advice.

After his dinner, he tried to read a little, but he could not attune himself to it ; and he grew more and more exasperated. When it struck ten, he took his walking-stick, a formidable oaken club which he always carried when he had to go out at night to visit the sick. Smilingly he regarded the enormous cudgel, holding it in his strong, countryman's fist and cutting threatening circles with it in the air. Then, suddenly, he raised it, and grinding his teeth, he brought it down upon a chair, the back of which split in two, and fell to the ground.

He opened his door to go out ; but he stopped upon the threshold, surprised by such a splendid moonlight as one seldom sees.

Endowed as he was with an exalted spirit, such a spirit as must have belonged to those dreamer-poets, the Fathers of the Church, he felt himself suddenly softened and moved by the grand and serene beauty of the pale night.

In his little garden, bathed in the soft brilliance, his fruit-trees, all in a row, were outlining upon the walk the shadows of their slender wooden limbs scarcely clothed with green ; while the giant honeysuckle climbing up the wall of the house exhaled delicious breaths as sweet as sugar, which hovered through the warm, clear night like a perfumed soul.

He began to breathe deep, drinking in the air as drunkards drink their wine, and he walked slowly, delighted, surprised, almost forgetting his niece.

As he stepped into the open country he stopped to contemplate the whole plain, inundated by this caressing radiance, and drowned in the tender and languishing charm of the serene night. In chorus the frogs threw into the air their short, metallic notes, and to the seduction of the moonlight, distant nightingales added that fitful music of theirs which brings no thoughts but dreams, that light and vibrant music which seems attuned to kisses.

The Abbé continued his walk, his courage failing, he knew not why. He felt, as it were, enfeebled, and suddenly exhausted ;

he had a great desire to sit down, to stop there and contemplate and admire God in all His works.

Below him, following the twists of the little river, wound a great line of poplars. Around and above the banks, wrapping all the tortuous watercourse in a kind of light, transparent wadding, hung suspended a fine mist, a white vapour, which the moon rays crossed, and silvered, and caused to gleam.

The priest paused again, penetrated to the depths of his soul by a strong and growing emotion. And a doubt, a vague uneasiness, seized on him; he felt that one of those questions he sometimes put to himself was now arising within him.

Why had God done this? Since the night is destined for sleep, for unconsciousness, for repose, for forgetfulness of everything, why, then, make it more charming than the day, sweeter than dawns and sunsets? And this slow, seductive star, more poetical than the sun, and so discreet that it seems designed to light up things too delicate, too mysterious, for the great luminary—why had it come to brighten all the shades?

Why did not the sweetest of all songsters go to rest like the others? Why set himself to singing in the disturbing shadows? Why this half-veil over the world? Why these quiverings of the heart, this emotion of the soul, this languor of the body? Why this display of seductions which mankind never sees, since men are asleep in their beds? For whom was this sublime spectacle intended, this flood of poetry poured from heaven to earth? The Abbé did not understand it at all.

But then, down there along the edge of the pasture appeared two shadows walking side by side under the arched roof of the trees all soaked in glittering mist.

The man was the taller, and had his arm about his sweetheart's neck; from time to time he kissed her on the forehead. They suddenly animated the lifeless landscape, which enveloped them like a divine frame made expressly for them. They seemed, these two, a single being, the being for whom this

calm and silent night was destined ; and they approached the priest like a living answer, the answer vouchsafed by his Master to his question.

He stood stock-still, overwhelmed, and with a beating heart. He fancied he was witnessing some Bible story, such as the loves of Ruth and Boaz, the accomplishment of the will of the Lord in one of those great scenes talked of in holy writ. Through his head ran the verses of the Song of Songs, the ardent cries, the calls of the body, all the passionate poetry of that poem burning with tenderness and love. And he said to himself, " God perhaps has made such nights as this to clothe with ideals the loves of men."

He withdrew before the embracing couple, who went on arm-in-arm. And yet it was his niece ; and now he wondered if he would not disobey the Lord. For does not God permit love, since He surrounds it visibly with splendour such as this ?

And he fled, in distraction, almost ashamed, as if he had penetrated into a temple where he had no right to enter.

A COUP D'ÉTAT

PARIS HAD JUST LEARNT OF THE DISASTER OF SEDAN. THE Republic was proclaimed. All France was panting at the outset of a delirium that lasted until after the Commune. Everybody was playing soldiers from one end of the country to the other.

Hatters became colonels, assuming the duties of generals; revolvers and daggers were displayed on large rotund paunches, enveloped in red sashes; common citizens became temporary warriors, commanding battalions of noisy volunteers, and swearing like troopers to emphasise their importance.

The mere fact of bearing arms and handling guns excited people who hitherto had only handled weighing-scales, and made them formidable to the first comer, without reason. They even executed a few innocent people to prove that they knew how to kill; and, in roaming through country places as yet innocent of Prussians, they shot stray dogs, cows chewing the cud in peace, or sick horses put out to pasture. Every man believed himself called upon to play a great rôle in military affairs. The cafés of the smallest villages, full of tradesmen in uniform, resembled barracks or field-hospitals.

Now, the town of Canneville did not yet know the news of the army and the Capital, but a violent agitation had been disturbing it for a month, and the rival parties had confronted each other. The Mayor, Vicomte de Varnetot, a small, thin man, already old, a Legitimist who had rallied recently to the Empire, spurred by ambition, had seen rising up against him a powerful adversary in Doctor Massarel, a stout, full-blooded man, head of the Republican party in the district, venerable chief of the Masonic Lodge in the county town, president of

the Society of Agriculture, chairman of the Fire Department banquet, and organiser of the rural militia which was to save the country.

In two weeks he had induced sixty-three married men and fathers of families to volunteer in defence of their country, prudent farmers and merchants of the town, and he drilled them every morning on the square in front of the Town Hall.

Whenever the mayor happened to appear at the Local Government building, Commander Massarel, covered with pistols, sword in hand, passing proudly up and down in front of his troops, would make them shout, "Long live our country!" And this, they noticed, disturbed the little Vicomte, who no doubt heard in it menace and defiance, and perhaps some odious recollection of the great Revolution.

On the morning of the Fifth of September the doctor, in uniform, his revolver on the table, was giving a consultation to an old peasant couple of whom the husband had suffered with varicose veins for seven years, but had waited until his wife had the same complaint before coming to see the doctor, when the postman arrived with the newspaper.

Doctor Massarel opened it, grew pale, straightened himself abruptly and, raising his arms to heaven in a gesture of exaltation, cried out with all his might, in the face of the amazed rustics :

"Long live the Republic! Long live the Republic! Long live the Republic!"

Then he dropped into his arm-chair weak with emotion.

When the peasant explained again that this sickness had begun with a feeling as if ants were running up and down in his legs, the doctor exclaimed: "Leave me in peace. I have no time to waste on such nonsense. The Republic is proclaimed! The Emperor is a prisoner! France is saved! Long live the Republic!" And, running to the door, he bellowed: "Céleste! Quick! Céleste!"

The frightened maid hastened in. He stuttered, so rapidly

did he try to speak : " My boots, my sword—my cartridge box—and—the Spanish dagger, which is on my night table. Hurry now ! "

The obstinate peasant, taking advantage of the moment's silence, began again : " They became like knots that hurt me when I walked. "

The exasperated doctor shouted : " Shut up, for Heaven's sake ! If you had washed your feet oftener, it would not have happened. " Then, seizing him by the neck, he hissed in his face : " Can't you understand that we are living in a Republic, idiot ? "

But a sense of his profession calmed him suddenly, and he let the astonished old couple out of the house, repeating :

" Come back to-morrow, come back to-morrow, my friends ; I have no time to-day. "

While equipping himself from head to foot, he gave another series of urgent orders to the maid :

" Run to Lieutenant Picart's and to Sub-lieutenant Pommel's and tell them that I want them here immediately. Send Torchebeuf to me, too, with his drum. Quick, now ! Quick ! " And when Céleste was gone, he collected his thoughts and prepared to overcome the difficulties of the situation.

The three men arrived together. They were in their working clothes. The Commander, who had expected to see them in uniform, gave a start of surprise.

" Good Lord ! You know nothing, then ? The Emperor has been taken prisoner. A Republic is proclaimed. We must take action. My position is delicate, I might almost say perilous. "

He reflected for some minutes in the presence of his astonished subordinates and then continued :

" We must act without hesitation. Minutes now are worth hours in times like these. Everything depends upon promptness of decision. You, Picart, go and find the priest and order him to ring the bell to bring the people together, so that I can

inform them. You, Torchebeuf, beat the call in every part of the district, as far as the hamlets of Gerisaie and Salmare, to assemble the militia in arms, in the square. You, Pommel, put on your uniform at once, that is, the jacket and cap. We, together, are going to take possession of the Town Hall and summon M. de Varnetot to transfer his authority to me. Do you understand ? ”

“ Yes.”

“ Act, then, and promptly. I will accompany you to your house, Pommel, since we are to work together.”

Five minutes later, the Commandant and his subaltern, armed to the teeth, appeared in the square, just at the moment when the little Vicomte de Varnetot, wearing hunting gaiters, and with his rifle on his shoulder, came along by another street, walking rapidly and followed by three gamekeepers in green jackets, each carrying a knife at his side and a gun over his shoulder.

While the doctor stopped in amazement, the four men entered the Town Hall and the door closed behind them.

“ We have been forestalled,” murmured the doctor. “ Now we shall have to wait for reinforcements ; nothing can be done for the time being.”

Lieutenant Picart reappeared : “ The priest refuses to obey,” said he ; “ he has even shut himself up in the church with the beadle and the usher.”

On the other side of the square, opposite the white, closed front of the Town Hall, the church, silent and sombre, showed its great oak door with the wrought-iron trimmings.

Then, as the puzzled inhabitants put their heads out of the windows, or came out upon their thresholds, the rolling of a drum was heard, and Torchebeuf suddenly appeared, beating with fury the three quick strokes of the call to arms. He crossed the square with disciplined step, and then disappeared along the road leading to the country.

The Commandant drew his sword, advanced alone about

half-way between the two buildings where the enemy was barricaded and, waving his weapon above his head, roared at the top of his lungs: "Long live the Republic! Death to traitors!" Then he fell back where his officers were. The butcher, the baker, and the apothecary, feeling a little uncertain, put up their shutters and closed their shops. The grocery alone remained open.

Meanwhile the men of the militia were gradually arriving, variously clothed, but all wearing caps with red braid, the cap constituting the whole uniform of the corps. They were armed with their old, rusty guns, guns that had hung over chimney-pieces in kitchens for thirty years, and looked quite like a detachment of foresters.

When there were about thirty around him, the Commandant explained in a few words the state of affairs. Then, turning toward his general staff, he said: "Now, we must act."

While the inhabitants collected, looked on, and discussed the matter, the doctor quickly formed his plan of campaign:

"Lieutenant Picart, you advance to the windows of the Town Hall and order M. de Varnetot to surrender it to me, in the name of the Republic."

But the Lieutenant was a master-mason and refused.

"You are very clever, aren't you? Trying to make a target of me! Those fellows in there are good shots, you know. No, thanks! Execute your commissions yourself!"

The Commandant turned red: "I order you to go in the name of discipline," said he.

The Lieutenant rebelled:

"I am not going to have my features spoiled without knowing the reason why."

The notables of the village, in a group near by, began to laugh. One of them called out: "You are right, Picart, it is not the proper time." The doctor, under his breath, muttered: "Cowards!" And, placing his sword and his revolver in the hands of a soldier, he advanced with measured step, his

eyes fixed on the windows, as if he expected to see the muzzle of a gun pointed at him.

When he was within a few steps of the building the doors at the two ends, affording an entrance to two schools, opened, and a flood of little creatures, boys on one side, girls on the other, poured out and began playing in the open space, chattering around the doctor like a flock of birds. He could hardly make himself heard.

As soon as they were all out, the two doors closed. The greater part of the little monkeys finally scattered, and then the Commandant called out in a loud voice :

"Monsieur de Varnetot !" A window in the first story opened and M. de Varnetot appeared.

The Commandant began : "Monsieur, you are aware of the great events which have changed the system of Government. The party you represent no longer exists. The side I represent now comes into power. Under these sad but decisive circumstances, I come to summon you, in the name of the new Republic, to place in my hands the authority vested in you by the out-going power."

M. de Varnetot replied : "Doctor Massarel, I am Mayor of Canneville, so placed by the proper authorities, and Mayor of Canneville I shall remain until the title is revoked and replaced by an order from my superiors. As Mayor, I am at home in the Town Hall and there I shall stay. Furthermore, just try to put me out." And he closed the window.

The Commandant returned to his troops. But, before explaining anything, measuring Lieutenant Picart from head to foot, he said :

"You are a fine fellow, you are—a goose, the disgrace of the army. I degrade you."

The Lieutenant replied : "I don't care a damn." And he went over to the group of grumbling citizens.

Then the doctor hesitated. What should he do ? Make an assault ? Would his men obey him ? And then, was he

in the right? Then he had a bright idea. He ran to the telegraph office opposite the town hall, on the other side of the square, and sent three dispatches: "To the Members of the Republican Government, at Paris"; "To the New Republican Prefect of the Seine-Inférieure, at Rouen"; "To the New Republican Sub-prefect of Dieppe."

He explained the situation fully; told of the danger which the district incurred by remaining in the hands of the monarchist mayor, offered his loyal services, asked for orders and signed his name, followed by all his titles. Then he returned to his army corps and, drawing ten francs out of his pocket, said:

"Now, my men, go and eat and drink a little something. Only leave here a detachment of ten men, so that no one leaves the town hall."

Ex-Lieutenant Picart, chatting with the watchmaker, overheard this. With a sneer he remarked: "Pardon me, but if they go out, you will have a chance to go in. Otherwise, I can't see how you are to get in there!"

The doctor made no reply, but went off to lunch. In the afternoon, he placed guards all about town, as if it were threatened by a surprise. Many times he passed before the doors of the Town Hall and of the church, without noticing anything suspicious; one might have believed the two buildings were empty.

The butcher, the baker, and the apothecary reopened their shops. There was a lot of talking in the houses. If the Emperor had been taken prisoner, there must be a traitor somewhere. They did not know exactly which Republic had been restored.

Night came on. Toward nine o'clock, the doctor returned quietly and alone to the entrance to the Town Hall, persuaded that his adversary had retired. And, as he was trying to force an entrance with a few blows of a pickaxe, the loud voice of a sentry demanded suddenly: "Who goes there?" Monsieur Massarel beat a retreat at top speed.

Another day dawned without any change in the situation. The militia in arms occupied the square. The inhabitants stood around them, awaiting the solution. People from neighbouring villages came to look on. Finally, the doctor, realising that his reputation was at stake, resolved to settle the thing in one way or another. He had just decided that it must be something energetic, when the door of the telegraph office opened and the little servant of the postmistress appeared, holding in her hand two papers.

First she went to the Commandant and gave him one of the dispatches ; then, crossing the deserted centre of the square, intimidated by so many eyes fixed upon her, with lowered head and running steps, she rapped gently at the door of the barricaded house, as if unaware that a party of men in arms was concealed there.

The door opened slightly ; the hand of a man received the message, and the girl returned, blushing and ready to weep, from being stared at by the whole country-side.

In vibrating tones the doctor shouted : " Silence, please." And, when the populace became quiet, he continued proudly :

" Here is a communication which I have received from the Government." And raising the telegram, he read :

" Old Mayor recalled. Please attend to urgent matters. Instructions will follow.

" For the Sub-prefect,
" SAPIN, Councillor."

He had triumphed. His heart was beating with joy. His hands were shaking. But Picart, his old subaltern, cried out to him from a neighbouring group : " That's all right ; but if the others in there won't get out, that piece of paper will not do you much good." M. Massarel turned pale. Supposing the others would not get out ? He would now have to take the offensive. It was not only his right, but his duty.

And he looked anxiously at the Town Hall, hoping that he might see the door open and his adversary retreat. But the door remained closed. What was to be done? The crowd was increasing, surrounding the militia. People were laughing.

One thought, especially, tortured the doctor. If he should make an assault, he must march at the head of his men; and as, once he were killed, there would be no opposition, it would be at him, and at him alone that M. de Varnetot and the three gamekeepers would aim. And their aim was good, very good! Picart had reminded him of that.

But an idea occurred to him, and turning to Pommel, he said: "Go, quickly, and ask the chemist to lend me a napkin and a pole."

The Lieutenant hurried off. The doctor was going to make a political banner, a white one, that would, perhaps, rejoice the Legitimist heart of the old mayor.

Pommel returned with the piece of linen required, and a broom handle. With some pieces of string, they improvised a flag, which Massarel seized in both hands. Again, he advanced towards the Town Hall, bearing the standard before him. When in front of the door, he called out: "Monsieur de Varnetot!"

The door opened suddenly, and M. de Varnetot and his three gamekeepers appeared on the threshold. The doctor recoiled, instinctively. Then, he saluted his enemy courteously, and announced, almost strangled by emotion: "I have come, sir, to communicate to you the instructions I have just received."

That gentleman, without any salutation whatever, replied: "I am going to withdraw, sir, but you must understand that it is not because of fear, or in obedience to an odious Government that has usurped power." And, biting off each word, he declared: "I do not wish to have the appearance of serving the Republic for a single day. That is all."

Massarel, amazed, made no reply; and M. de Varnetot, walking off at a rapid pace, disappeared around the corner,

followed closely by his escort. Then the doctor, mad with pride, returned to the crowd. When he was near enough to be heard, he cried: "Hurrah! Hurrah! The Republic triumphs all along the line!"

But no emotion was manifested. The doctor tried again: "The people are free! You are free and independent! Do you understand? Be proud of it!"

The listless villagers looked at him with eyes unlit by glory. In his turn, he looked at them, indignant at their indifference, seeking for some word that could make a grand impression, electrify this placid country and make good his mission. The inspiration came, and turning to Pommel, he said: "Lieutenant, go and get the bust of the Ex-Emperor, which is in the Municipal Council Hall, and bring it to me with a chair."

And soon the man reappeared, carrying on his right shoulder, Napoleon III in plaster, and holding in his left hand a straw-bottomed chair.

Massarel met him, took the chair, placed it on the ground, put the white image upon it, fell back a few steps and called out, in sonorous voice:

"Tyrant! Tyrant! At last you have fallen! Fallen in the dust and in the mire. An expiring country groaned beneath your foot. Avenging fate has struck you down. Defeat and shame cling to you. You fall conquered, a prisoner to the Prussians, and upon the ruins of the crumbling Empire the young and radiant Republic arises, picking up your broken sword."

He awaited applause. But not a shout was raised, not a hand clapped. The bewildered peasants remained silent. And the bust, with its pointed moustaches extending beyond the cheeks on each side, the bust, as motionless and well groomed as a hairdresser's sign, seemed to be looking at M. Massarel with a plaster smile, an ineffaceable and mocking smile.

They remained thus face to face, Napoleon on the chair, the doctor in front of him about three steps away. Suddenly

the Commandant grew angry. What was to be done? What was there that would move these people, and bring about a definite victory of opinion? His hand happened to rest on his hip and to come in contact there with the butt-end of his revolver, under his red sash. No inspiration, no further word would come. So he drew his pistol, advanced two steps, and, taking aim, fired at the late monarch. The ball entered the forehead, leaving a little, black hole, like a spot, nothing more. It made no effect. Then he fired a second shot, which made a second hole; then, a third; and then, without stopping, he emptied his revolver. The brow of Napoleon disappeared in white powder, but the eyes, the nose, and the fine points of the moustaches remained intact. Then, the exasperated doctor overturned the chair with a blow of his fist and, resting a foot on the remainder of the bust in an attitude of triumph, he turned to the flabbergasted public and shouted: "So let all tyrants perish!"

Still no enthusiasm was manifest, and as the spectators seemed to be in a kind of stupor from astonishment, the Commandant called to the militiamen: "You may now go to your homes." And he went toward his own house with great strides, as if he were pursued.

His maid, when he appeared, told him that some patients had been waiting in his office for three hours. He hastened in. There were the two varicose-vein patients, who had returned at daybreak, obstinate and patient.

The old man immediately began his explanation: "This began by a feeling like ants running up and down my legs."

MOIRON

AS THEY WERE STILL SPEAKING OF PRANZINI, M. MALOUREAU, who had been Attorney-General under the Empire, said :

" I once knew a very curious affair, curious from many points of view, as you will see.

" I was at that time Public Prosecutor in the provinces, and stood very well at Court, thanks to my father, who was first President at Paris. I had charge of a case which has remained famous, called ' The Affair of Schoolmaster Moiron.'

" M. Moiron, a schoolmaster in the north of France, bore an excellent reputation in all the country-side. He was an intelligent, thoughtful, very religious man, rather silent, and had married in the district of Boislinot, where he practised his profession. He had had three children, who all died, one after the other, from consumption. After the loss of his own little ones, he seemed to lavish upon the urchins confided to his care all the tenderness concealed in his heart. He bought, with his own money, playthings for his best pupils, for the best behaved and the nicest. He allowed them to have play dinners, and gorged them with dainties, sweetmeats and cakes. Everybody loved and praised this good man and his tender heart, when five of his pupils suddenly died of a very mysterious disease. It was believed that an epidemic prevailed, caused by the water being made impure from drought. They looked for the cause, without discovering it, the more so, because the symptoms were very strange. The children appeared to be taken with a languor, could eat nothing, complained of pains in the stomach, and finally died in most terrible agony.

" An autopsy was made of the last victim, but nothing was

discovered. The entrails were sent to Paris and analysed, but showed no sign of any toxic substance.

"For one year no further deaths occurred; then two little boys, the best pupils in the class, favourites of old Moiron, expired in four days' time. An examination was ordered, and in each body fragments of pounded glass were found imbedded in the organs. They concluded that the two children had eaten imprudently of something carelessly prepared. The breaking of a glass over a bowl of milk would have been enough to cause this frightful accident, and the matter would have rested there had not Moiron's servant been taken ill just at that time. The physician found the same morbid signs that he observed in the preceding attacks of the children, and, upon questioning her, finally obtained the confession that she had stolen and eaten some sweets, bought by the master for his pupils.

"Upon order of the court, the schoolhouse was searched and a closet was found, full of toys and sweets for the children. Nearly all these edibles contained fragments of glass or broken needles.

"Moiron, who was immediately arrested, appeared so indignant and horrified at being suspected that he was nearly released. Nevertheless, the indications of his guilt were so apparent that they fought hard in my mind against my first conviction, which was based upon his good reputation, his entire record, and the absolute absence, the incredibility, of any motive for such a crime.

"Why should this good, simple, religious man kill children, and the children whom he seemed to love best? Why should he select those he had feasted with dainties, for whom he had spent in playthings and sweets half his stipend?

"To admit this, one would have to conclude that he was insane. But Moiron seemed so reasonable, so calm, so full of judgment and good sense! It was impossible to prove insanity in him.

"Proofs accumulated, nevertheless! Sweets, cakes, marsh-

mallows, and other things seized at the shops where the schoolmaster got his supplies, were found to contain nothing suspicious.

"He alleged that some unknown enemy had opened his closet with a false key and placed the glass and needles in the sweets. And he invented a whole story about a legacy dependent on the death of a child, sought out and discovered by a peasant, and so worked up as to make the suspicion fall upon the schoolmaster. This brute, he said, was not interested in the other poor children, who were also condemned to die.

"This was plausible. The man appeared so sure of himself and so sorry, that we should have acquitted him without doubt, if two overwhelming discoveries had not been made, one after the other. The first was a snuff-box full of ground glass! It was his own snuff-box, in a secret drawer of his writing-desk, where he kept his money.

"He explained this in a manner almost acceptable, by saying that it was the final ruse of the unknown culprit. But a draper from Saint-Marlouf presented himself at the house of the judge, and told him that Moiron had bought needles of him many times, the finest needles he could find, breaking them to see whether they suited him.

"The draper brought as witnesses a dozen persons who recognised Moiron at first glance. And the inquiry revealed the fact that the schoolmaster was at Saint-Marlouf on the days mentioned by the merchant.

"I pass over the terrible evidence of the children as to the master's choice of dainties, and his care in making the little ones eat in his presence and destroying all traces of the feast.

"Outraged public opinion demanded capital punishment, and took on a new force from exaggerated terror, which allows of no delays or resistance.

"Moiron was condemned to death. His appeal was rejected. No recourse remained to him for pardon. I knew from my father that the Emperor would not grant it.

"One morning, as I was at work in my office, the chaplain of the prison was announced. He was an old priest who had a great knowledge of men and a large acquaintance among criminals. He appeared worried, constrained, and uneasy. After talking a few moments of other things, he said abruptly, on rising :

" ' If Moiron is decapitated, you will have allowed the execution of an innocent man. '

"Then, without bowing, he went out, leaving me under the profound effect of his words. He had pronounced them in a solemn, moving fashion, opening lips, closed and sealed by the secret of the confessional, in order to save a life.

"An hour later I was on my way to Paris, and my father, at my request, asked for an immediate audience with the Emperor.

"I was received the next day. Napoleon III was at work in a little room when we were introduced. I explained the whole affair, even to the visit of the priest, and, in the midst of the story, the door opened behind the chair of the Emperor, and the Empress, believing him to be alone, entered. His Majesty consulted her. As soon as she heard the facts, she exclaimed :

" ' This man must be pardoned ! He must, because he is innocent. '

"Why should this sudden conviction of a woman so pious throw into my mind a terrible doubt ?

"Up to that time I had ardently desired a commutation of the sentence. And now I felt myself the puppet, the dupe of an adroit criminal, who had used the priest and the confessional as a means of defence.

"I showed some hesitation to their Majesties. The Emperor remained undecided, torn on one hand by his natural goodness, and on the other held back by the fear of allowing himself to be made a fool of by a scoundrel ; but the Empress, convinced that the priest had obeyed a divine call, repeated : ' What does

it matter? It is better to spare a guilty man than to kill an innocent one.' Her advice prevailed. The penalty of death was commuted, and that of hard labour was substituted.

"Some years after I heard that Moiron, whose exemplary conduct at Toulon had been made known again to the Emperor, was employed as a servant by the director of the penitentiary. And then I heard no word of this man for a long time.

"About two years after this, when I was passing the summer at Lille, in the house of my cousin, de Larielle, I was told, one evening, as we were sitting down to dinner, that a young priest wished to speak to me.

"I told them to let him come in, and he begged me to go with him to a dying man, who desired, above all things, to see me. This had happened often, during my long career as judge, and, although I had been put aside by the Republic, I was still called upon from time to time in like circumstances.

"I followed the priest, who took me to a little miserable lodging, under the roof of a lofty workmen's tenement. There, upon a pallet of straw, I found a dying man, seated with his back against the wall, in order to breathe. He was a sort of grimacing skeleton, with deep, shining eyes.

"When he saw me he murmured: 'You do not know me?'

"'No.'

"'I am Moiron.'

"I shivered, but said: 'The schoolmaster?'

"'Yes.'

"'How is it you are here?'

"'That would take too long—I haven't time—I am going to die. They brought me this priest—and as I knew you were here, I sent him for you. It is to you that I wish to confess—since you saved my life long ago.'

"He seized with his dry hands the straw of his bed, and continued, in a rasping, bass voice:

"'There . . . I owe you the truth—to you, because it is necessary to tell it to someone before leaving the earth.'

“ ‘It was I who killed the children—all—it was I—for vengeance !

“ ‘Listen. I was an honest man, very honest—very honest—very pure—adoring God—the good God—the God that they teach us to love, and not the false God, the executioner, the robber, the murderer who governs the earth—I had never done wrong, never committed a villainous act. I was pure as one unborn.

“ ‘After I was married I had children, and I began to love them as never father or mother loved their own. I lived only for them. I was foolish. They died, all three of them ! Why ? Why ? What had I done ? I ? I had a change of heart, a furious change. Suddenly I opened my eyes as though waking from a dream, and I saw that God is wicked. Why had He killed my children ? I opened my eyes and I saw that He loved to kill. He loves only that, Monsieur. He gives life only to take it away ! God is a murderer ! Some death is necessary to Him every day. He causes death in many ways, the better to amuse Himself. He has invented sickness and accident in order to divert Himself through all the long months and years, and, when He is weary, He has epidemics, plague, cholera, diphtheria, smallpox ; and I know not what else this monster has invented.

“ ‘All that was not enough. All those evils are too much alike. From time to time He sends war, in order to see two hundred thousand soldiers laid low, bruised in blood and mire, with arms and legs torn off, heads broken by bullets, like eggs that fall along the road.

“ ‘That is not all. He has made men who eat one another. And then, as men become better than He, He has made beasts to see men chase them, slaughter, and eat them. That is not all. He has made all the little animals that live for a day, flies which increase by myriads in an hour, ants, that one crushes, and others, many, so many that we cannot even imagine them. And all kill one another, chase one another,

devour one another, and constantly die. And the good God looks on and is amused, because He sees everything, the largest as well as the smallest, those which are in drops of water, as well as those in the stars. He looks at them all and is amused! Ugh! Beast!

" 'So, I, Monsieur, I also have killed some children. I played this trick on Him. It was not He who got them. It was not He, it was I. And I would have killed still more, but you took me away. That's all!

" 'I was going to die, guillotined. I! How He would have laughed, the reptile! Then I asked for a priest, and lied to him. I confessed. I lied, and I lived.

" 'Now it is all over. I can no longer escape Him. But I have no fear of Him, Monsieur, I despise Him too much.'

" It was frightful to see this miserable creature, hardly able to breathe, talking in gasps, opening an enormous mouth to eject words that were barely audible, pulling up the cloth of his straw bed, and, under a blanket that was nearly black, moving his thin legs, as if to run away.

" Oh! the awful creature, and the awful remembrance!

" I said: 'Have you nothing more to say?'

" 'No, Monsieur.'

" 'Then, farewell.'

" 'Farewell, sir. Some day. . . .'

" I turned toward the priest, who was livid, and whose sombre silhouette was thrown upon the wall.

" 'You will remain?'

" 'I will remain.'

" Then the dying man sneered: 'Yes, yes, he sends crows to dead bodies.'

" As for me, I had had enough of it. I opened the door and ran away."

QUEEN HORTENSE

THEY CALLED HER QUEEN HORTENSE IN ARGENTEUIL. No one ever knew why. Perhaps because she spoke firmly, like an officer giving orders. Perhaps because she was large, bony, and imperious. Perhaps because she governed a multitude of domestic animals, hens, dogs, cats, canaries, and parrots—those animals so dear to old maids. But she neither spoiled these familiar subjects, nor addressed them with loving words, those tender puerilities which seem to slip from the lips of a woman to the velvety coat of a purring cat. She governed her beasts with authority. She ruled.

She was an old maid, one of those old maids with harsh voice and awkward gesture, whose soul seems hard. She had always had young servants, because youth more easily adapts itself to strong wills. She never allowed contradiction from any person, nor argument, nor would she tolerate hesitation, or indifference, or idleness, or fatigue. No one ever heard her complain, or regret what was, or envy others. "To each one his share," she would say, with fatalistic conviction. She never went to church, cared nothing for the priests, scarcely believed in God, and called all religious things "stuff for mourners."

For thirty years she had lived in her little house, with its tiny garden in front, extending along the street, never modifying her way of living, changing only her maids, and that mercilessly, when they became twenty-one years old.

She replaced, without tears and without regrets, her dogs or cats or birds, when they died of old age, or by accident, and she buried the dead animals in a flower-bed, heaping the earth above them with a small spade and treading it down with perfect indifference.

She had in the town a few acquaintances, the families of clerks, whose men travelled to Paris every day. From time to time, they would invite her to spend the evening and drink a cup of tea with them. She inevitably fell asleep on these occasions, and they were obliged to wake her up so that she could go home. She never allowed anyone to accompany her, having no fear by night or day. She seemed to have no love for children.

She occupied her time with a thousand masculine cares, carpentry, gardening, cutting or sawing wood, repairing her old house, even doing mason's work when it was necessary.

She had some relatives who came to see her twice a year. Her two sisters, Madame Cimme and Madame Columbel, were married, one to an herbalist, the other to a man with small private means. Madame Cimme had no children; Madame Columbel had three: Henri, Pauline, and Joseph. Henri was twenty-one, Pauline, seventeen, and Joseph only three, having come when one would have thought the mother past the age. No tenderness united this old maid to her kinsfolk.

In the spring of 1882, Queen Hortense became suddenly ill. The neighbours went for a doctor, whom she drove away. When the priest presented himself she got out of bed, half naked, and put him out. The little maid, weeping, made herb tea for her.

After three days in bed, the situation became so grave that the carpenter living next door, on the advice of the doctor, who had returned to the house on his own authority, took it upon himself to summon the two families.

They arrived by the same train, about ten o'clock in the morning; the Columbels having brought their little Joseph.

When they arrived at the garden gate, they saw the maid seated on a chair against the wall, weeping. The dog lay asleep on the mat before the front door, under a broiling sun; two cats, that looked dead, lay stretched out on the window-sills, with eyes closed and paws and tails extended at full length.

A great clucking hen was promenading before the door, at the head of a flock of chicks covered with yellow down, and in a large cage hung against the wall, covered with chickweed, were several birds, singing themselves hoarse in the light of this hot spring morning.

A pair of "inseparables," in a little cage in the form of a cottage, remained quiet, side by side on their perch.

M. Cimme, a large, wheezy personage, who always entered a room first, pushing aside men and women when it was necessary, remarked to the maid: "Well, Céleste! Is it so bad as that?"

The little maid sobbed through her tears:

"She doesn't know me any more. The doctor says it is the end."

They all looked at one another.

Madame Cimme and Madame Columbel embraced each other instantly, without saying a word.

They resembled each other very much, always wearing their hair parted in the middle, and shawls of red cashmere, as bright as hot coals.

Cimme turned toward his brother-in-law, a pale man, yellow and thin, tormented by indigestion, who limped badly, and said to him in a serious tone:

"Gad! It was time!"

But no one dared to go into the room of the dying woman, which was on the ground floor. Cimme himself let the others go before him. Columbel was the first to make up his mind; he entered, swaying like the mast of a ship, making a noise on the floor with the ferrule of his walking-stick.

The two women ventured to follow, and M. Cimme brought up the line.

Little Joseph remained outside, drawn by the sight of the dog.

A ray of sunlight fell on the bed, just lighting up the hands which moved nervously, opening and shutting without ceasing.

The fingers moved as if a thought animated them, as if they would signify something, indicate some idea, obey some intelligence. The rest of the body remained motionless under the sheet. The angular figure gave no start. The eyes remained closed.

The relatives arranged themselves in a semicircle and, without saying a word, watched the heaving breast and the short breathing. The little maid had followed them, still shedding tears.

Finally, Cimme asked : " What did the doctor say exactly ? "

The servant stammered : " He said we must leave her alone, that nothing more could be done."

Suddenly the lips of the old maid began to move. She seemed to pronounce some silent words, concealed in her dying brain, and her hands quickened their singular movement.

Then she spoke in a little, thin voice, quite unlike her own, a voice that seemed to come from far off, perhaps from the bottom of that heart always closed.

Cimme walked upon tiptoe, finding this spectacle painful. Columbel, whose lame leg was growing tired, sat down.

The two women remained standing.

Queen Hortense muttered something quickly, which they were unable to understand. She pronounced some names, called tenderly some imaginary persons :

" Come here, my little Philippe, kiss your mother. You love mamma, don't you, my child ? You, Rose, you will watch your little sister while I am out. Above all, don't leave her alone, do you hear ? And I forbid you to touch matches."

She was silent some seconds ; then, in a loud tone, as if she was calling, she said : " Henriette ! " She waited a little and continued : " Tell your father to come and speak to me before going to his office." Then suddenly : " I am not very well to-day, dear ; promise me you will not return late ; you will

tell your chief that I am ill. You know it is dangerous to leave the children alone when I am in bed. I am going to make you a dish of rice and sugar for dinner. The little ones like it so much. Claire will be so pleased ! ”

She began to laugh, a youthful and noisy laugh, as she had never laughed before. “ Look at Jean,” she said, “ how funny he looks. He has smeared himself with jam, the dirty little thing ! Look ! my dear, how funny he looks ! ”

Columbel, who kept changing the position of his lame leg every moment, murmured : “ She is dreaming that she has children and a husband ; the end is near.”

The two sisters did not move, but seemed surprised and stunned.

The little maid said : “ Will you take off your hats and your shawls, and go into the other room ? ”

They went out without having said a word. And Columbel followed them limping, leaving the dying woman alone again.

When they were relieved of their outer garments, the women seated themselves. Then one of the cats left the window, stretched herself, jumped into the room, then upon the knees of Madame Cimme, who began to caress her.

They heard from the next room the voice of the dying woman, living, without doubt, in this last hour, the life she had wished for, pouring out her dreams at the very moment when all would be finished for her.

Cimme, in the garden, played with little Joseph and the dog, enjoying himself, with all the gaiety of a fat man in the country, without a thought for the dying woman.

But suddenly he entered, and addressed the maid : “ I say, my girl, are you going to give us some lunch ? What are you going to eat, ladies ? ”

They decided upon an omelet of fine herbs, a piece of fillet with new potatoes, cheese, and a cup of coffee.

And as Madame Columbel was fumbling in her pocket for

her purse Cimme stopped her, and turning to the maid said, "You must have some money?" and she answered: "Yes, sir."

"How much?"

"Fifteen francs."

"That's enough. Make haste, now, my girl, because I am getting hungry."

Madame Cimme, looking out at the climbing flowers bathed in the sunlight, and at two pigeons making love on the roof opposite, said, with a heart-broken air: "It is unfortunate to have come for so sad an event. It would be nice in the country, to-day."

Her sister sighed without answering, and Columbel murmured, moved perhaps by the thought of a walk:

"My leg plagues me awfully."

Little Joseph and the dog made a terrible noise, one shouting with joy and the other barking violently. They played at hide-and-seek around the three flower-beds, running after each other like mad.

The dying woman continued to call her children, chatting with each, imagining that she was dressing them, that she caressed them, that she was teaching them to read: "Come, Simon, repeat, A, B, C, D. You do not say it well; see, D, D, D, do you hear? Repeat, now. . . ."

Cimme declared: "It is extraordinary the things one talks about at such times."

Then said Madame Columbel: "It would be better, perhaps, to go in there."

But Cimme dissuaded her from it:

"Why go in, since we are not able to do anything for her? Besides we are as well off here."

No one insisted. Madame observed the two green birds, the "inseparables." She remarked pleasantly upon this singular fidelity, and blamed men for not imitating these little creatures. Cimme looked at his wife and laughed, singing with a banter-

ing air, "Tra-la-la, Tra-la-la," as if to say he could tell some things about his own fidelity.

Columbel, taken with cramps in his stomach, struck the floor with his cane. The other cat entered, its tail in the air. They did not sit down at table until one o'clock.

When he had tasted the wine, Columbel, who could drink only choice Bordeaux, called the servant :

"I say, is there nothing better than this in the cellar?"

"Yes, sir; there is some of the wine that was served when you used to come here."

"Oh, well, go and bring three bottles."

They tasted this wine, which seemed excellent. Not that it was of a remarkable vintage, but it had been fifteen years in the cellar. Cimme declared it was real wine for invalids.

Columbel, seized with a desire to possess this Bordeaux, asked of the maid: "How much is left of it, my girl?"

"Oh, nearly all, sir; Mademoiselle never drank any of it. It is at the bottom of the cellar."

Then Columbel turned toward his brother-in-law: "If you wish, Cimme, I will take this wine in exchange for something else; it agrees with my stomach wonderfully."

The hen, in her turn, had entered with her troop of chicks; the two women amused themselves by throwing crumbs to them. Joseph and the dog were sent back into the garden as they had eaten enough.

Queen Hortense spoke continually, but in a whisper now, so that it was no longer possible to distinguish the words.

When they had finished the coffee, they all went in to learn the condition of the sick woman. She seemed calm.

They went out and seated themselves in a circle in the garden, to digest their food.

Presently the dog began to run around the chairs with all speed, carrying something in his mouth. The child ran wildly after him. Both disappeared into the house. Cimme fell asleep, with his stomach in the sun.

The dying woman began to speak loudly again. Then suddenly she shouted.

The two women and Columbel hastened in to see what had happened. Cimme awakened but did not move, as he did not care for such things.

The dying woman was sitting up, staring with haggard eyes. Her dog, to escape the pursuit of little Joseph, had jumped upon the bed, and across the dying woman. Intrenched behind the pillow, he was peeping at his comrade with eyes glistening, ready to jump again at the least movement. He held in his mouth one of the slippers of his mistress, all torn by his teeth, as he had been playing with it for an hour.

The child, intimidated by the woman rising so suddenly before him, stood motionless before the bed.

The hen, which had also entered, had jumped upon a chair, frightened by the noise, and was desperately calling to her chicks, which were peeping, frightened, from under the four legs of the chair.

Queen Hortense cried out in piercing tones: "No, no, I do not wish to die! I don't want to! Who will bring up my children? Who will care for them? Who will love them? No I won't! . . . I am not. . . ."

She fell back. All was over.

The dog, much excited, jumped into the room and skipped about.

Columbel ran to the window and called his brother-in-law: "Come quickly! come quickly! I believe she is gone."

Then Cimme got up and resolutely went into the room, muttering: "It did not take so long as I thought it would."

THE CHILD

AFTER SWEARING FOR A LONG TIME THAT HE WOULD NEVER marry, Jacques Bourdillère suddenly changed his mind. It happened one summer at the seaside, quite unexpectedly.

One morning, as he was stretched on the sand, watching the women come out of the water, a little foot caught his attention, because of its slimness and delicacy. As he raised his eyes higher, the entire person seemed attractive. Of this entire person he had, however, seen only the ankles and the head emerging from a white flannel bath-robe, fastened with care. He was called sensual and dissipated, and it was by grace of form alone that he was first captured. Afterwards he was held by the charm and sweet spirit of the young girl, who was simple and good and fresh, like her cheeks and her lips.

When he was introduced to the family, they liked him and soon he was head over heels in love. When he saw Berthe Lannis at a distance, on the long stretch of yellow sand, he trembled from head to foot. Near her he was dumb, incapable of saying anything or even of thinking, with a kind of bubbling in his heart, a humming in his ears, and a frightened feeling in his mind. Was this love?

He did not know, he did not understand it, but he was fully decided to make this child his wife.

Her parents hesitated a long time, deterred by the bad reputation of the young man. He had a mistress, it was said—an old mistress, an old and strong entanglement, one of those chains which one believes broken, but continue to hold, nevertheless. In addition, he had loved, for longer or shorter periods, every woman who had come within reach of his lips.

But he turned over a new leaf, and would not even consent to see once more the woman with whom he had lived so long. A friend arranged her pension, assuring her a livelihood. Jacques paid, but he did not wish to hear her name mentioned, pretending henceforth that he did not even know who she was. She wrote letters which he would not open. Every week he recognised the clumsy handwriting of the woman he had abandoned, and every week a greater anger arose in him against her, and he would tear the envelope in two, without opening it, without reading a line, knowing beforehand the reproaches and complaints it would contain.

As there was but little belief in his perseverance, he was put to the test during the whole winter, and it was not until the spring that his suit was accepted.

The marriage took place in Paris during the early part of May. It was decided that they should not go on the usual honeymoon. After a little ball, a dance for her young cousins, which would not last beyond eleven o'clock, and would not prolong for ever the fatigue of that day of ceremonies, the young couple intended to pass their first night at the family home and to set out the next morning for the seaside, where they had met and loved.

The night came, and people were dancing in the big drawing-room. The newly-married pair had withdrawn into a little Japanese boudoir with bright silk hangings, and scarcely lighted this evening, except by the dim rays from a coloured lantern in the shape of an enormous egg, which hung from the ceiling. The long window was open, allowing at times a fresh breath of air from without to blow upon their faces, for the evening was soft and warm, full of the odour of springtime.

They said nothing, but held each other's hands, pressing them from time to time with all their force. She was a little dazed by this great change in her life ; her eyes were dreaming. She was smiling, deeply moved, ready to weep, often ready to

swoon from joy, believing the entire world changed because of what had come to her, a little disturbed without knowing the reason why, and feeling all her body, all her soul, enveloped in an indefinable, delightful lassitude.

He watched her all the time, smiling with a fixed smile. He wished to talk but found nothing to say, and remained quiet, expressing all his ardour in the pressing of her hand. From time to time he murmured "Berthe!" and each time she raised her eyes to his with a sweet and tender look. They would look at each other a moment, then his eyes, fascinated by hers, would fall.

They discovered no ideas to exchange. But they were left alone, except that sometimes a dancing couple would cast a glance at them in passing, a furtive glance, as if it were the discreet and confidential witness of a mystery.

A side door opened, a domestic entered, bearing upon a tray an urgent letter which a messenger had brought. Jacques trembled as he took it, seized with a vague and sudden fear, the mysterious fear of sudden misfortune.

He looked for a long time at the envelope, not knowing the handwriting, nor daring to open it, wishing not to read, not to know the contents, desiring to put it in his pocket and to say to himself: "To-morrow. To-morrow, I shall be far away and it will not matter!" But upon the corner were two words underlined: *very urgent*, which frightened him. "Allow me, my dear," said he, and he tore off the wrapper. He read the letter, growing frightfully pale, running over it at a glance, and then seeming slowly to spell it out.

When he raised his head his whole countenance was changed. He stammered: "My dear little girl, a great misfortune has happened to my best friend. He needs me immediately, in a matter of—of life and death. Allow me to go for twenty minutes. I will return immediately."

She, trembling and frightened, murmured: "Go, dear!" not yet being enough of a wife to dare to ask or demand to

know anything. And he disappeared. She remained alone, listening to the dance music in the next room.

He had taken the first hat he could find, and an overcoat, and had run down the stairs. As he was going out into the street he stopped under a gaslight in the hall and re-read the letter. It said :

“ SIR : A girl called Ravet, who appears to be your ex-mistress, has given birth to a child which she asserts is yours. The mother is dying and implores you to visit her. I take the liberty of writing to you to ask whether you will grant the last wish of this woman, who seems to be very unhappy and worthy of pity.

“ Yours faithfully,
“ DR. BONNARD.”

When he entered the room of the dying woman she was already in the last agony. He did not know her at first. The doctor and two nurses were looking after her, and all over the floor were pails full of ice and linen stained with blood.

Water covered the floor, two candles were burning on a table ; behind the bed, in a little wicker cradle, a child was crying, and, at each of its cries, the tortured mother would try to move, shivering under the icy compresses.

She was bleeding, wounded to death, killed by this birth. Her life was slipping away ; and, in spite of the ice, in spite of all the care, the hæmorrhage continued, hastening her last hour.

She recognised Jacques, and tried to raise her hand. She was too weak for that, but the warm tears began to glide down her cheeks.

He fell on his knees beside the bed, seized one of her hands and kissed it frantically ; then, little by little, he approached nearer to the wan face, which quivered at his touch. One of the nurses, standing with a candle in her hand, threw the light upon them, and the doctor, who had stepped into the background, looked at them from the end of the room.

With a far-off voice, breathing hard, she said: "I am going to die, dearest; promise me you will remain till the end. Oh! do not leave me now, not at the last moment!"

He kissed her brow, her hair, with a groan. "Do not be uneasy," he murmured, "I will stay."

It was some minutes before she was able to speak again, she was so weak and overcome. Then she continued: "It is yours, the little one. I swear it before God, I swear it to you upon my soul, I swear it at the moment of death. I have never loved any man but you—promise me not to abandon it——" He tried to take in his arms the poor, weak body, emptied of its life-blood. He stammered, moved by remorse and grief: "I swear to you I will bring it up and love it. It shall never be separated from me." Then she held Jacques in an embrace. Powerless to raise her head, she held up her blanched lips in an appeal for a kiss. He bent his mouth to receive this poor, suppliant caress.

Calmed a little, she murmured in a low tone: "Take it, that I may see that you love it."

He went to the cradle and took up the child.

He placed it gently on the bed between them. The little creature ceased to cry. She whispered: "Do not stir!" And he remained motionless. There he stayed, holding in his burning palms a hand that shook with the tremor of death, as he had held, an hour before, another hand that had trembled with the tremor of love. From time to time he looked at the hour, with a furtive glance of the eye, watching the hand as it passed midnight, then one o'clock, then two.

The doctor had retired. The two nurses, after roaming around for some time with light step, slept now in their chairs. The child slept, and the mother, whose eyes were closed, seemed to be resting also.

Suddenly, as the pale daylight began to filter through the torn curtains, she extended her arms with so startling and violent a motion that she almost threw the child upon the floor. There

was a rattling in her throat ; then she lay on her back motionless, dead.

The nurses, who had hastened to her side, said : " It is over."

He looked once at this woman he had loved, then at the hand that marked four o'clock, and, forgetting his overcoat, fled in his evening clothes with the child in his arms.

After she had been left alone, his young bride had waited calmly at first, in the Japanese boudoir. Then, seeing that he did not return, she went back to the drawing-room, indifferent and quiet in appearance, but frightfully disturbed. Her mother, perceiving her alone, asked where her husband was. She replied : " In his room ; he will return presently."

After an hour, as everybody asked about him, she told of the letter, of the change in Jacques' face, and her fears of some misfortune.

They still waited. The guests gone ; only the parents and near relatives remained. At midnight, they put the bride in her bed, shaking with sobs. Her mother and two aunts were seated on the bed listening to her weeping. Her father had gone to the police headquarters to make inquiries. At five o'clock a light sound was heard in the corridor. The door opened and closed softly. Then suddenly a cry, like the mewling of a cat, went through the house, breaking the silence.

All the women of the house were up with one bound, and Berthe was the first to spring forward, in spite of her mother and her aunts, clothed only in her night-robe.

Jacques was standing in the middle of the room, livid, breathing hard, holding a child in his arms.

The four frightened women looked at him, but Berthe suddenly took courage, her heart wrung with anguish, and ran to him saying : " What is it ? Tell me ! What is it ? "

He looked as if he had lost his senses and answered in a husky voice : " It is—it is—I have a child, and its mother has just died." And he put into her arms the howling little baby.

Berthe, without saying a word, seized the child and embraced

it, straining it to her heart. Then, turning toward her husband with her eyes full of tears, she said: "The mother is dead, you say?" He answered: "Yes, just died—in my arms—I had broken with her since last summer—I knew nothing about it—only the doctor sent for me and——"

Then Berthe murmured: "Well, we will bring up this little one."

THE PARDON

SHE HAD BEEN BROUGHT UP IN ONE OF THOSE FAMILIES WHO live shut up in themselves, and seem to be remote from everything. They pay no attention to political events, although they chat about them at table, and changes in government seem so far, so very far away that they are spoken of only as a matter of history—like the death of Louis XVI, or the landing of Napoleon.

Customs change, fashions succeed each other, but this is hardly perceptible in the family, where old traditions are always followed. And if some impossible story arises in the neighbourhood, the scandal of it dies at the threshold of this house.

The father and mother, alone in the evening, sometimes exchange a few words on such a subject, but in an undertone, as if the walls had ears.

With great discretion, the father says : " Do you know about this terrible affair in the Rivoil family ? "

And the mother replies : " Who would have believed it ? It is frightful ! "

The children have no suspicion of anything, but come to the age of living, in their turn, with a bandage over their eyes and minds, without ever suspecting any other kind of existence, without knowing that one does not always think as one speaks, nor speak as one acts, without knowing that it is necessary to live at war with the world, or at least in armed peace, without surmising that the ingenuous are frequently deceived, the sincere trifled with, and the good wronged.

Some go on until death in this blindness of probity, loyalty, and honour ; so upright that nothing can open their eyes.

Others, undeceived, without realising why, are weighed down with despair, and die believing that they are the puppets of exceptional fate, the miserable victims of unlucky circumstance or particularly bad men.

The Savignols married their daughter Berthe when she was eighteen. Her husband was a young man from Paris, Georges Baron, whose business was on the Stock Exchange. He was an attractive youth, with a smooth tongue, and he observed all the outward proprieties necessary. But at the bottom of his heart he sneered a little at his guileless parents-in-law, calling them, among his friends, "My dear fossils."

He belonged to a good family, and the young girl was rich. He took her to live in Paris.

She became one of the numerous race of provincials in Paris. She remained ignorant of the great city, of its elegant people, of its pleasures and its customs, as she had always been ignorant of the perfidy and mystery of life.

Shut up in her own household, she only knew the street she lived in, and when she ventured into another quarter, it seemed to her that she had journeyed far, into an unknown, strange city. She would say in the evening :

"I crossed the boulevards to-day."

Two or three times a year, her husband took her to the theatre. These were great events not to be forgotten, which she recalled continually.

Sometimes at table, three months afterwards, she would suddenly burst out laughing and exclaim :

"Do you remember that ridiculous actor who imitated the cock's crowing?"

All her interests were limited to two allied families, who represented the whole of humanity to her. She designated them by the distinguishing prefix "the," calling them respectively "the Martinets," or "the Michelints."

Her husband lived according to his fancy, coming home at whatever hour he wished, sometimes at daybreak, pretending

business, and feeling in no way constrained, so sure was he that no suspicion would ruffle this candid soul.

But one morning she received an anonymous letter. She was dismayed, being too upright to see the infamy of such accusations, to scorn this letter, whose author declared himself to be moved by interest in her happiness, by hatred of all evil and love of truth.

But it revealed to her that her husband had had a mistress for two years, a young widow, Mme Rosset, at whose house he spent all his evenings.

She knew neither how to pretend nor to dissimulate, to spy or to plan any sort of ruse. When he returned for luncheon, she threw him the letter, sobbing, and then fled from the room.

He had time to understand the matter and prepare his answer before he rapped at his wife's door. She opened it immediately, without looking at him. He smiled, sat down, and drew her to his knee. In a sweet voice, and a little jocosely, he said :

"My dear little one, Mme Rosset is a friend of mine. I have known her for ten years and like her very much. I may add that I know twenty other families of whom I have not spoken to you, knowing that you care nothing for the world or for forming new friendships. But in order to end, once for all, these infamous lies, I will ask you to dress yourself, after luncheon, and we will go to pay a visit to this young lady, who will become your friend at once, I am sure." She embraced her husband eagerly ; and, from feminine curiosity, which never sleeps once it has been aroused, she did not refuse to go to see this unknown woman, of whom, in spite of everything, she was still suspicious. She felt by instinct that a known danger is sooner overcome.

They were ushered into a pretty little apartment on the fourth floor of a handsome house, full of bric-à-brac and artistically decorated. After about five minutes' waiting, in a drawing-room where the light was dimmed by draperies, hangings, and curtains tastefully arranged, a door opened and a young woman

appeared. She was very dark, small, rather plump, and looked astonished, although she smiled. Georges presented them. "My wife, Madame Julie Rosset."

The young widow uttered a little cry of astonishment and joy, and came forward with both hands extended. She had not hoped for this happiness, she said, knowing that Madame Baron saw no one. But she was so happy! She was so fond of Georges! (She said "Georges" quite naturally, with sisterly familiarity.) And she had had a great desire to know his young wife, and to love her, too.

At the end of a month these two friends were never apart from each other. They met every day, often twice a day, and nearly always dined together, either at one house or at the other. Georges scarcely ever went out now, no longer alleging business engagements, but he said he loved his own chimney corner.

And when finally an apartment was vacant in the house where Madame Rosset resided, Madame Baron hastened to take it in order to be nearer her new friend.

During two whole years there was a friendship between them without a cloud, a friendship of heart and soul, absolute, tender, devoted, and delightful. Berthe could not speak without mentioning Julie's name, for to her Julie represented perfection. She was happy with a perfect happiness, calm and secure.

But Madame Rosset fell ill. Berthe never left her. She passed nights of despair; her husband, too, was broken-hearted.

One morning, on coming out from his visit the doctor took Georges and his wife aside, and announced that he found the condition of their friend very grave.

When he had gone out, the young people, stricken down, looked at each other and then began to weep. They both watched at night by the bedside. Every moment Berthe would embrace the sick woman tenderly, while Georges, standing

silently at the foot of her couch, would look at them with dogged persistence. The next day she was worse.

Finally, toward evening, she declared herself better, and persuaded her friends to go home to dinner.

They were sitting sadly at table, scarcely eating anything, when the maid brought Georges an envelope. He opened it, turned pale, and rising, said to his wife, in a constrained way: "Excuse me, I must leave you for a moment. I will return in ten minutes. Please don't go out." And he ran into his room for his hat.

Berthe waited, tortured by a new fear. But, yielding in all things, she would not go up to her friend's room again until he had returned.

As he did not reappear, the thought came to her to look in his room to see whether he had taken his gloves, which would show whether he had really gone somewhere.

She saw them there, at first glance. Near them lay a crumpled paper, where he had thrown it.

She recognised it immediately; it was the one that had just been given to Georges.

And a burning temptation took possession of her, the first of her life, to read—to know. Her conscience struggled in revolt, but the itch of an exacerbated and cruel curiosity impelled her hand. She seized the paper, opened it, recognised at once the handwriting as that of Julie, a trembling hand, written in pencil. She read:

"Come alone and embrace me, my poor dear; I am going to die."

She could not understand it all at once, but stood stupefied, struck especially by the thought of death. Then, suddenly, the familiarity of it seized upon her mind. This came like a great light, illuminating her whole life, showing her the infamous truth, all their treachery, all their perfidy. She saw now their prolonged cunning, their sly looks, her good faith

abused, her confidence deceived. She saw them looking into each other's face, under the shade of her lamp in the evening, reading from the same book, exchanging glances at the end of the pages.

And her heart, stirred with indignation, bruised with suffering, sank into an abyss of despair that had no boundaries.

When she heard steps, she fled and shut herself in her room.

Her husband called her : " Come quickly, Madame Rosset is dying ! "

Berthe appeared at her door and said with trembling lip :

" Go alone to her ; she has no need of me."

He looked at her wildly, dazed with grief, and repeated :

" Quick, quick ! She is dying ! "

Berthe answered : " You would prefer if it were I."

Then he understood, probably, and left her to herself, going up again to the dying woman.

There he wept without fear, or shame, indifferent to the grief of his wife, who would no longer speak to him, nor look at him, but who lived shut in with her disgust and angry revolt, praying to God morning and evening.

They lived together, nevertheless, eating together face to face, mute and hopeless.

After a time, he recovered his calm, but she would not pardon him. And so life continued hard for them both.

For a whole year they lived thus, strangers one to the other. Berthe almost became mad.

Then one morning, having set out at dawn, she returned about eight o'clock, carrying in both hands an enormous bouquet of roses, of white roses, all white.

She sent word to her husband that she would like to speak to him. He came in disturbed, troubled.

" Let us go out together," she said to him. " Take these flowers, they are too heavy for me."

He took the bouquet and followed his wife. A carriage awaited them, which started as soon as they were seated.

It stopped before the gate of a cemetery. Then Berthe, her eyes full of tears, said to Georges: "Take me to her grave."

He trembled, without knowing why, but walked on in front, holding the flowers in his arms. Finally he stopped before a shaft of white marble and pointed to it without a word.

She took the bouquet from him, and, kneeling, placed it at the foot of the grave. Then she sank into an unfamiliar prayer of supplication.

Her husband stood behind her, weeping, haunted by memories.

She arose and put out her hands to him.

"If you wish, we will be friends," she said.

THE WOLF

THIS IS WHAT THE OLD MARQUIS D'ARVILLE TOLD US AFTER A dinner in honour of Saint Hubert, at the house of Baron des Ravels. They had run down a stag that day. The Marquis was the only one of the guests who had not taken part in the chase. He never hunted.

During the whole of the long repast, they had talked of scarcely anything but the massacre of animals. Even the ladies interested themselves in the sanguinary and often unlikely stories, while the speakers mimicked the attacks and combats between man and beast, raising their arms and speaking in thunderous tones.

M. d'Arville talked well, with a certain poetical flourish that was full of effect. He must have repeated this story often, he told it so smoothly, never halting at a choice of words in which to clothe an image.

"Gentlemen, I never hunt, nor did my father, nor my grandfather, nor my great-grandfather. The last named was the son of a man who hunted more than all of you. He died in 1764. I will tell you how. He was named Jean, and was married, and became the father of the man who was my great-grandfather. He lived with his younger brother, François d'Arville, in our castle, in the midst of a deep forest in Lorraine.

"François d'Arville always remained a bachelor out of his love for hunting. They both hunted from one end of the year to the other without cessation or weariness. They loved nothing else, understood nothing else, talked only of this, and lived for this alone.

"They were possessed by this terrible, inexorable passion. It consumed them, having taken entire control of them, leaving

no place for anything else. They had given orders that they were never to be disturbed when they were hunting, for any reason whatsoever. My great-grandfather was born while his father was following a fox, but Jean d'Arville did not interrupt his sport, and swore that the little beggar might have waited until after the death-cry! His brother François showed himself still more hot-headed than he. The first thing on rising, he would go to see the dogs, then the horses; then he would shoot some birds about the place, until it was time to set out hunting larger game.

"They were called in the country Monsieur le Marquis and Monsieur le Cadet: noblemen then did not act as do the interlopers of our time, who wish to establish in their titles a descending scale of rank, for the son of a marquis is no more a count, or the son of a viscount a baron, than the son of a general is a colonel by birth. But the petty vanity of our time finds profit in this arrangement.

"To return to my ancestors:

"They were, it appears, immoderately large, bony, hairy, violent, and vigorous. The younger one was even taller than the elder, and had such a voice that, according to a legend of which he was very proud, all the leaves of the forest moved when he shouted. When they were mounted, ready for the chase, it must have been a superb sight to see these two giants astride their great horses.

"Toward the middle of the winter of that year, 1764, the cold was excessive and the wolves became ferocious.

"They even attacked belated peasants, roamed around houses at night, howled from sunset to sunrise, and ravaged the barns.

"Very soon a rumour was circulated. It was said that a colossal wolf, of greyish-white colour, which had eaten two children, devoured the arm of a woman, strangled all the watch-dogs of the country, was now coming without fear into the enclosures and smelling around the doors. Many inhabitants affirmed that they had felt his breath, which made the

lights flicker. Shortly a panic ran through all the province. No one dared to go out after nightfall. The very shadows seemed haunted by the image of this beast.

"The brothers d'Arville resolved to find and slay him. So they called together all the gentlemen of the country for a big hunt.

"It was in vain. They beat the forests and scoured the thickets to no purpose; they saw nothing of him. They killed wolves, but not that one. And each night after the hunt, the beast, as if to avenge himself, attacked some traveller, or devoured some cattle, always far from the place where they had sought him.

"Finally, one night he found a way into the pigsty of the d'Arville castle and ate two beauties of the best breed.

"The two brothers were furious, interpreting the attack as one of bravado on the part of the monster—a direct injury, a defiance. Therefore, taking all their best-trained hounds, accustomed to follow the most redoubtable quarry, they set out to run down the beast, their hearts filled with rage.

"From dawn until the sun descended behind the great leafless trees, they beat about the forests with no result.

"At last, both of them, angry and disheartened, turned their horses' steps into a bypath bordered by brushwood, marvelling at the power of this wolf to baffle their knowledge, and suddenly seized with a mysterious fear.

"The elder said :

" 'This can be no ordinary beast. It almost looks as if he can reason like a man.'

"The younger replied :

" 'Perhaps we should get our cousin, the Bishop, to bless a bullet for him, or ask a priest to pronounce some words to help us.'

"Then they were silent.

"Jean continued : 'Look at the sun; how red it is. The great wolf will do mischief to-night.'

“ He had scarcely finished speaking when his horse reared. François’s horse started to run at the same time. A large bush covered with dead leaves parted before them, and a colossal beast, greyish-white, sprang out, scampering away through the wood.

“ Both gave a grunt of satisfaction, and bending to the necks of their heavy horses, they urged them on with the weight of their bodies, driving them forward with such speed, exciting them, hastening them with voice and spur, that these strong riders seemed to carry the weight of their beasts between their knees, carrying them along as if they were flying.

“ Thus they rode, at full speed, crashing through thickets, crossing ravines, climbing up the sides of hills, and plunging into gorges, sounding the horn with loud blasts, to arouse the people and the dogs of the neighbourhood.

“ But suddenly, in the course of this breakneck ride, my ancestor struck his forehead against a large branch and fractured his skull. He fell to the ground as if dead, while his frightened horse disappeared into the shadows that were enveloping the woods.

“ The younger d’Arville stopped short, sprang to the ground, seized his brother in his arms, and saw that his brains were coming out of the wound with his blood.

“ He sat down beside him, took his disfigured and gory head upon his knees, looking earnestly at the lifeless face. Little by little a fear crept over him, a strange fear that he had never before felt, fear of the shadows, of the solitude, of the lonely woods, and also of the chimerical wolf, which had now avenged itself by killing his brother.

“ The shadows deepened, the branches of the trees crackled in the sharp cold. François arose shivering, incapable of remaining there any longer, and already feeling his strength fail. There was nothing to be heard, neither the voice of the dogs nor the sound of the horns; all within this invisible horizon was mute. And in this gloomy silence and the chill of evening there was something strange and frightful.

"With his powerful hands he seized Jean's huge body and laid it across the saddle to take it home ; then he resumed his way slowly, his mind troubled by horrible, extraordinary images, as if he were intoxicated.

"Suddenly, along the path darkened by the night, a great form passed. It was the wolf. A violent fit of terror seized upon the hunter ; something cold, like a stream of water, seemed to glide down his back, and he made the sign of the Cross, like a monk haunted by devils, so dismayed was he by the reappearance of the frightful wanderer. Then, his eyes falling upon the inert body before him, his fear was quickly changed to anger, and he trembled with inordinate rage.

"He pricked his horse and darted after him.

"He followed him through copses, ravines, and great forests, traversing woods that he no longer recognised, his eyes fixed upon a white spot, which was ever flying from him as night covered the earth.

"His horse also seemed moved by an unknown force and ardour. He galloped on with neck extended, crashing over small trees and rocks, with the body of the dead man stretched across him on the saddle. Brambles caught in his hair ; his head, where it struck the enormous tree trunks, spattered them with blood ; his spurs tore off pieces of bark.

"Suddenly the animal and its rider came out of the forest, and rushed into a valley as the moon appeared above the hills. This valley was stony and shut in by enormous rocks, with no other outlet ; and the wolf, caught in a corner, turned around.

"François gave a shout of joy and revenge which the echoes repeated like a roll of thunder. He leaped from his horse, knife in hand.

"The bristling beast, with rounded back, was awaiting him, his eyes shining like two stars. But before joining battle, the strong hunter, grasping his brother, seated him upon a rock, supporting his head, which was now but a mass of blood,

with stones, and cried aloud to him, as to one deaf: 'Look, Jean! Look here!'

"Then he threw himself upon the monster. He felt himself strong enough to overthrow a mountain, to crush the rocks in his hands. The beast tried to bite, and to rip up his stomach; but the man had seized it by the throat, without even making use of his weapon, and was strangling it gently, listening to its breath stopping in its throat, and its heart ceasing to beat. And he laughed with mad joy, clutching it more and more strongly with a terrible hold, and crying out in his delirium: 'Look, Jean! Look!' All resistance ceased. The body of the wolf was limp. He was dead.

"Then François, taking him in his arms, threw him down at the feet of his elder brother, crying out in expectant voice: 'Here, here, Jean, dear, here he is!'

"Then he placed upon the saddle the two bodies, the one above the other, and started on his way.

"He returned to the castle laughing and weeping, like Gargantua at the birth of Pantagruel, shouting in triumph and stamping with delight in relating the death of the beast, and moaning and tearing at his beard in telling the death of his brother.

"Often, later, when he recalled that day, he would declare, with tears in his eyes: 'If only poor Jean had seen me strangle the beast, he would have died happy, I am sure!'

"The widow of my ancestor inspired in her son a horror of hunting, which was transmitted from father to son down to myself."

The Marquis d'Arville was silent. Someone asked: "That is a legendary tale, is it not?"

And the narrator replied:

"I swear to you it is true from beginning to end."

Then a lady, in a sweet little voice, declared:

"Well, it is beautiful to have passions like that."

THE LEGEND OF MONT SAINT-MICHEL

I HAD FIRST SEEN IT FROM CANCALE, THIS FAIRY CASTLE PLANTED in the sea. I had seen it dimly, like a grey shadow rising in the foggy sky. I saw it again from Avranches at sunset. The immense stretch of sand was red, the horizon was red, the whole boundless bay was red; alone, the Abbey, growing out there in the distance like a fantastic manor, like a dream palace, incredibly strange and beautiful—this alone remained almost black in the purple of the dying day.

The following morning at dawn I went towards it across the sands. My eyes fastened on this gigantic jewel, as big as a mountain, cut like a cameo, and as dainty as lace. The nearer I approached the greater my admiration grew, for perhaps nothing in the world is more wonderful or more perfect.

As surprised as if I had discovered the habitation of a god, I wandered through those halls supported by frail or massive columns, through those corridors open to the sky, raising my eyes in wonder to those spires which looked like rockets starting for the sky, and to that incredible crowd of towers, of gargoyles, of slender and charming ornaments, fireworks of stone, granite lace, a masterpiece of colossal and delicate architecture.

As I was looking up in ecstasy, a Lower Normandy peasant came up to me and told me the story of the great quarrel between Saint Michel and the Devil.

A sceptical genius has said: "God made man in His image; man has returned the compliment."

This saying is an eternal truth, and it would be very curious to write the history of the local divinity on every continent, as well as the history of the patron saints in each one of our

provinces. The negro has his ferocious man-eating idols ; the polygamous Mahometan fills his paradise with women ; the Greeks, like a practical people, have deified all the passions.

Every village in France is under the influence of some protecting saint, modified according to the characteristics of the inhabitants.

Saint Michel watches over Lower Normandy, Saint Michel, the radiant and victorious angel, the sword-carrier, the hero of Heaven, the victorious, the conqueror of Satan.

But this is how the Lower Normandy peasant, cunning, underhand, and tricky, understands and tells of the struggle between the great Saint and the Devil :

To escape from the malice of his neighbour the Demon, Saint Michel built himself, in the open ocean, this habitation worthy of an archangel ; and only such a saint could build a residence of such magnificence.

But, as he still feared the approaches of the Evil One, he surrounded his domain with quicksands, more treacherous even than the sea.

The Devil lived in a humble cottage on the hill ; but he owned all the pastures surrounded by the sea, the rich lands where grow the finest crops, the prosperous valleys, and all the fertile hills of the country ; but the Saint ruled only over the sands. So Satan was rich, whereas Saint Michel was as poor as a beggar.

After a few years of fasting the Saint grew tired of this state of affairs, and began to think of some compromise with the Devil ; but the matter was by no means easy, as Satan kept a good hold on his crops.

He thought the thing over for about six months ; then one morning he set out for land. The Demon was eating his soup in front of his door when he saw the Saint ; he immediately rushed toward him, kissed the hem of his sleeve, invited him in, and offered him refreshments.

Saint Michel drank a bowl of milk and then began : " I have come here to propose to you a good bargain."

The Devil, candid and trustful, answered : " Very well."

" Here it is. Give me all your lands."

Satan, growing alarmed, tried to speak : " But——"

The Saint continued : " Listen first. Give me all your lands. I will take care of all the work, the ploughing, the sowing, the fertilising, everything, and we will share the crops equally. Do you agree ? "

The Devil, who was naturally lazy, accepted. He only asked in addition for a few of those delicious red mullet which are caught around the lonely hill. Saint Michel promised the fish.

They shook hands and spat on one side to show that it was a bargain, and the Saint continued : " Here, so that you will have nothing to complain of, choose whatever you prefer : that part of the harvest which will be above ground, or in the ground." Satan cried out : " I choose all that will be above ground."

" It's a bargain ! " said the Saint. And he went away.

Six months later, all over the immense domain of the Devil, one could see nothing but carrots, turnips, onions, salsify, all the plants whose juicy roots are good and savoury, and whose useless leaves are good for nothing but for feeding animals.

Satan got nothing and wished to break the contract, calling Saint Michel a swindler.

But the Saint, who had developed quite a taste for agriculture, went back to see the Devil, and said : " Really, I hadn't thought of that at all ; it was just an accident ; no fault of mine. And to make things fair with you, this year I'll let you take everything that is under the ground."

" Very well," answered Satan.

The following spring, all the Evil Spirit's lands were covered with heavy corn, oats as big as beans, linseed, magnificent colzas, red clover, peas, cabbage, artichokes, everything that blossoms into grains or fruit in the sunlight.

Once more Satan received nothing, and this time he com-

pletely lost his temper. He took back his fields and remained deaf to all the new overtures of his neighbour.

A whole year rolled by. From the top of his lonely manor, Saint Michel looked at the distant and fertile lands, and watched the Devil direct the work, take in his crops, and thresh the corn. And he grew angry, exasperated at his powerlessness. As he was no longer able to deceive Satan, he decided to wreak vengeance on him, and he went out to invite him to dinner for the following Monday.

"You have been very unfortunate in your dealings with me," he said; "I know it; but I don't want any ill feeling between us, and I expect you to dine with me. I'll give you some good things to eat."

Satan, who was as greedy as he was lazy, accepted eagerly. On the day which had been decided on, he donned his finest clothes and set out for the mount.

Saint Michel sat him down to a magnificent meal. First there was a *vol-au-vent*, full of cocks' crests and kidneys, with meat-balls, then two big red mullet with cream sauce, a turkey stuffed with chestnuts soaked in wine, some salt-marsh lamb as tender as possible, vegetables which melted in the mouth, and nice warm *galette* which was brought on smoking and gave out a delicious odour of butter.

They drank pure cider, sparkling and sweet, and powerful red wine, and after each course more room was made with some old apple brandy.

The Devil drank and ate to his heart's content; in fact, he took so much that he found himself uncomfortable.

Then Saint Michel arose in anger, and cried, in a voice like thunder: "What! before me, rascal! you dare—before me——"

Satan, terrified, ran away, and the Saint, seizing a stick, pursued him. They ran around through the halls, turning around the pillars, running up the staircases, galloping along the cornices, jumping from gargoyles to gargoyles. The poor

Demon, who was terribly ill, was running about madly and soiling the Saint's home. At last he found himself at the top of the last terrace, from which could be seen the immense bay, with its distant cities, sands, and pastures. He could no longer escape, and the Saint came up behind him and gave him a furious kick, which shot him through space like a cannon-ball.

He shot through the air like a javelin and fell down heavily in front of the town of Mortain. His horns and claws stuck deep into the rock, which keeps through eternity the traces of this fall of Satan's.

He stood up again, limping, crippled until the end of time, and as he looked at the fatal Abbey in the distance, standing out against the setting sun, he understood well that he would always be vanquished in this unequal struggle; and he went away limping, heading for distant countries, leaving to his enemy his fields, his hills, his valleys, and his pastures.

And this is how Saint Michel, the patron saint of Normandy, vanquished the Devil.

Another people imagined this battle quite differently.

A CHRISTMAS TALE

DOCTOR BONENFANT WAS SEARCHING HIS MEMORY, SAYING, half aloud: "A Christmas story—some remembrance of Christmas?"

Suddenly he cried: "Yes, I have one, and a strange one too; it is a fantastic story. I have seen a miracle! yes, ladies, a miracle, and on Christmas night."

You are astonished to hear me speak thus, a man who does not believe in much. Nevertheless, I have seen a miracle! I have seen it, I tell you, seen with my own eyes, that is what I call seeing.

Was I very much surprised, you ask? Not at all; because if I do not believe in your beliefs, I believe in faith, and I know that it can remove mountains. I could cite many examples; but I might make you indignant, and I should run the chance of lessening the effect of my story.

In the first place, I must confess that, if I have not been convinced and converted by what I have seen, I have at least been strongly moved; and I am going to strive to tell it to you naïvely, as if I had the credulity of an Auvergnat.

I was then a country doctor, living in the town of Rolleville, in the centre of Normandy. The winter that year was terrible. By the end of November the snow came after a week of frost. One could see from afar the great snow clouds coming from the north, and then the white flakes began to fall. In one night the whole plain was buried. Farms, isolated in their square enclosures, behind their curtains of great trees powdered with hoar-frost, seemed to sleep under the accumulation of this thick, light covering.

No noise was heard in the still country-side. The crows alone in large flocks outlined long festoons in the sky, seeking their livelihood to no purpose, swooping down upon the pale fields and picking at the snow with their great beaks. There was nothing to be heard but the vague, continuous rustle of this white powder as it persistently fell. This lasted for eight full days and then stopped. The earth had on its back a mantle five feet in thickness. And, during the next three weeks, a sky as clear as blue crystal by day spread itself out over this smooth, white mass, hard and glistening with frost, and at night all studded with stars, that looked as if they were made of hoar-frost.

The plain, the hedges, the elms of the enclosures, all seemed dead, killed by the cold. Neither man nor beast went out. Only the chimneys of the cottages, clothed in a white shift, revealed concealed life by the fine threads of smoke which mounted straight into the frosty air. From time to time one heard the trees crack, as if their wooden limbs were breaking under the bark; and sometimes a great branch would detach itself and fall, the resistless cold petrifying the sap and breaking the fibres. Dwellings set here and there in fields seemed a hundred miles away from one another. One lived as one could. I alone endeavoured to go to my nearest patients, constantly exposing myself to the danger of remaining buried in some hole.

I soon perceived that a mysterious terror had spread over the country. Such a plague, they thought, was not natural. They pretended that they heard voices at night, sharp whistling and passing cries. These cries and the whistling came, without doubt, from migratory birds which travelled at twilight and flew in flocks toward the south. But it was impossible to make frightened people listen to reason. Fear had taken possession of their minds, and they were expecting some extraordinary event.

The forge of old Vatinel was situated at the end of the hamlet of Epivent, on the main road, now invisible and deserted. As

the people needed bread, the blacksmith resolved to go to the village. He remained some hours chattering with the inhabitants of the six houses which formed the centre of the district, took his bread and his news and a little of the fear which had spread over the region and set out before night.

Suddenly, in skirting a hedge, he believed he saw an egg on the snow; yes, an egg was lying there, all white like the rest of the world. He bent over it, and in fact it was an egg. Where did it come from? What hen could have gone out there and laid an egg in that spot? The smith was astonished; he could not understand it; but he picked it up and took it to his wife.

"See, wife, here is an egg that I found on the road."

The woman shook her head:

"An egg on the road? In this kind of weather! You must be drunk, surely."

"No, no, woman, it certainly was at the foot of the hedge, and not frozen but still warm. Take it; I put it in my bosom so that it wouldn't cool off. You shall have it for your dinner."

The egg was soon shining in the iron pot where the soup was simmering, and the smith began to relate what he had heard around the country. The woman listened, pale with excitement.

"Of course I have heard some whistling," said she, "but it seemed to come from the chimney."

They sat down to table, ate their soup first and then, while the husband was spreading the butter on his bread, the woman took the egg and examined it with suspicious eye.

"And if there should be something in this egg," said she.

"What could there be in it?"

"How do I know?"

"Go ahead and eat it. Don't be a fool."

She opened the egg. It was like all eggs, and very fresh. She started to eat it but hesitated, tasting, then leaving, then tasting it again. The husband said:

"Well, how does that egg taste?"

She did not answer, but finished swallowing it. Then, suddenly, she stared at her husband, with fixed, haggard, terrified eyes, raised her arms, turned and twisted them, convulsed from head to foot, and rolled on the floor, sending forth horrible shrieks. All night she struggled in these frightful spasms, trembling with fright, deformed by hideous convulsions. The smith, unable to restrain her, was obliged to bind her. And she screamed without ceasing, untiringly:

"I have it in my body! I have it in my body!"

I was called the next day. I ordered all the sedatives known, but without effect. She was mad. Then, with incredible swiftness, in spite of the obstacle of deep snow, the news, the strange news ran from farm to farm: "The smith's wife is possessed!" And they came from everywhere around, not daring to go into the house; from a safe distance they listened to the cries of the frightened woman, whose voice was so strong that one could scarcely believe it belonged to a human creature.

The village priest was sent for. He was a simple old man. He came in surplice, as if to administer comfort to the dying, and pronounced with extended hands some formulæ of exorcism, while four men held the foaming, writhing woman on the bed. But the spirit was not driven out.

Christmas came without any change in the weather. On Christmas Eve morning the priest came for me.

"I wish," said he, "to have this unfortunate woman at mass, to-night. Perhaps God will work a miracle in her favour at the same hour that he was born of a woman."

I replied: "I approve heartily. If she can be touched by the sacred service (and nothing could be more likely to move her), she can be saved without other remedies."

The old priest murmured: "You are not a believer, Doctor, but you will help me, will you not?" I promised him my help.

The evening came, and then the night. The bell of the

church was ringing, throwing its plaintive voice across the dreary waste, the vast extent of white, frozen snow. Some black figures were wending their way slowly in groups, obedient to the call from the bell. The full moon shone with a strong, pale light on the horizon, rendering more visible the desolation of the fields. I had taken four robust men with me, and with them repaired to the forge.

The possessed woman was bound to her bed, and was shouting continually. They clothed her properly, in spite of her violent resistance, and carried her out. The church, illuminated but cold, was now full of people, the choir chanted their monotonous notes; the serpent hummed; the little bell of the acolyte tinkled, regulating the movements of the faithful.

I had shut the woman and her guards into the kitchen of the parish house and awaited the moment that I believed favourable.

I chose the time immediately following communion. All the peasants, men and women, had received their God, to soften His rigour. A great silence prevailed while the priest finished the divine mystery. Upon my order, the door opened and the four men brought in the madwoman.

When she saw the lights, the crowd on their knees, the choir illuminated, and the gilded tabernacle, she struggled with such vigour that she almost escaped from us, and she gave forth cries so piercing that a shiver of fright ran through the church. All bowed their heads; some fled. She had no longer the form of a woman, as she writhed and twisted in our grasp, her countenance drawn, her eyes mad. They dragged her up to the steps of the choir, and then she was firmly held squatting on the floor.

The priest arose; he was waiting. When there was a moment of quiet, he took in his hands the monstrance, bound with bands of gold, in the middle of which was the white wafer, and, advancing some steps, extended both arms above his head and presented it to the frightened stare of the maniac.

She continued to howl, with eyes fixed upon the shining object. And the priest remained so motionless that he looked like a statue.

This lasted a long, long time. The woman seemed seized with fear, fascinated; she looked fixedly at the monstrance; she was still seized with terrible shivering fits, but they did not last so long, and she cried out incessantly, but with a less piercing voice. And this lasted again for some time.

It looked as if she could no longer lower her eyes; as if they were riveted on the Host; she did nothing but groan; her rigid body relaxed, and she sank down exhausted. The crowd was prostrate, with foreheads pressed to the ground.

The possessed woman was now lowering her eyelids rapidly, then raising them again, as if powerless to endure the sight of her God. She was silent. And then I suddenly perceived that her eyes were closed. She was sleeping like a somnambulist, hypnotised—pardon! conquered by the prolonged contemplation of the monstrance with its shining rays of gold, overcome by Christ victorious.

They carried her out, inert, while the priest went up to the altar. The congregation, thrown into wonderment, intoned a *Te Deum* of gratitude.

The smith's wife slept for forty hours uninterruptedly, then she awoke without any remembrance either of the possession or of the deliverance. That, ladies, is the miracle which I witnessed.

Doctor Bonenfant remained silent, then he added, in rather vexed tones :

"I could not refuse to swear to it in writing."

Def. 21

A WIDOW

IT WAS DURING THE HUNTING SEASON, AT THE DE BANVILLE country seat. The autumn was rainy and dull. The red leaves, instead of crackling under foot, rotted in the hollows beneath the heavy showers.

The almost leafless forest was as humid as a bathroom. When you entered it beneath the huge trees shaken by the winds, a mouldy odour, a vapour from fallen rain, soaking grass and damp earth, enveloped you. And the hunters, bending beneath this continuous downpour, the dogs with their tails hanging and their coats matted, and the young huntswomen in their close-fitting habits drenched with rain, returned each evening depressed in body and spirit.

In the great drawing-room, after dinner, they played lotto, but without enthusiasm, while the wind shook the shutters violently, and turned the old weather-vanes into spinning-tops. Someone suggested telling stories, in the way we read of in books; but no one could invent anything very amusing. The hunters narrated some of their adventures with the gun, the slaughter of rabbits, for example; and the ladies racked their brains without finding anywhere the imagination of Scheherazade.

They were about to abandon this form of diversion, when a young lady, carelessly playing with the hand of her old, unmarried aunt, noticed a little ring made of blond hair, which she had often seen before but thought nothing about.

Moving it gently about the finger she said, suddenly: "Tell us the story of this ring, Auntie; it looks like the hair of a child——"

The old maid reddened and then grew pale, and in a trem-

bling voice she replied : " It is sad, so sad that I never care to speak about it. All the unhappiness of my life is centred in it. I was young then, but the memory of it remains so painful that I weep whenever I think of it."

They wished very much to hear the story, but the aunt refused to tell it ; finally, they urged so much that she at length consented.

" You have often heard me speak of the Santèze family, now extinct. I knew the last three men of this family. They all died within three months in the same manner. This hair belonged to the last one. He was thirteen years old, when he killed himself for me. That appears very strange to you, doesn't it ?

" They were an extraordinary race, a race of fools, if you will, but of charming fools, of fools for love. All, from father to son, had these violent passions, waves of emotion which drove them to most exalted deeds, to fanatical devotion, and even to crime. It was to them what ardent devotion is to certain souls. Those who become monks are not of the same nature as drawing-room favourites. Their relatives used to say : ' as amorous as a Santèze.'

" To see them was to divine this characteristic. They all had curly hair, growing low upon the brow, curly beards and large eyes, very large, whose rays seemed to penetrate and disturb you, without your knowing just why.

" The grandfather of the one of whom this is the only souvenir, after many adventures, and some duels on account of entanglements with women, when about sixty-five fell passionately in love with the daughter of his bailiff. I knew them both. She was blond, pale, distinguished looking, with a soft voice and a sweet look, so sweet that she reminded one of a madonna. The old lord took her home with him, and immediately became so captivated that he could not do without her for a minute. His daughter and his daughter-in-law, who lived in the house, found this perfectly natural, so much was

love a tradition of the family. When one was moved by a great passion, nothing surprised them, and, if anyone spoke in their presence of thwarted desires, of disunited lovers, or revenge upon some treachery, they would both say, in the same sad tones: 'Oh! how he (or she) must have suffered before coming to that!' Nothing more. They were moved with pity by all dramas of the heart and never spoke slightly of them, even when they were criminal.

"One autumn, a young man, M. de Gradelle, invited for the hunting, eloped with the young woman.

"M. de Santèze remained calm, as if nothing had happened. But one morning they found him hanging in the kennel in the midst of the dogs.

"His son died in the same fashion, in a hotel in Paris, while on a journey in 1841, after having been deceived by an opera singer.

"He left a child twelve years old, and a widow, the sister of my mother. She came with the little boy to live at my father's house, on our Bertillon estate. I was then seventeen.

"You could not imagine what an astonishing, precocious child this little Santèze was. One would have said that all the power of tenderness, all the exaltation of his race had fallen upon this one, the last. He was always dreaming and walking alone in a great avenue of elms that led from the house to the woods. I often watched this sentimental youngster from my window, as he walked up and down with his hands behind his back, with bowed head, sometimes stopping to look up, as if he saw and comprehended things beyond his age and experience.

"Often, after dinner, on clear nights, he would say to me: 'Let us go and dream, cousin.' And we would go together into the park. He would stop abruptly in the clear spaces, where the white vapour floats, that soft cotton with which the moon decorates the clearings in the woods, and say to me, seizing my hand: 'Look! Look there! But you do not understand me, I feel it. If you understood me, you would

be happy. In order to know, one must love.' I would laugh and embrace him, this boy, who adored me so much as to die of love.

"Often, too, after dinner, he would seat himself upon my mother's knee. 'Come, Aunt,' he would say to her, 'tell us some love-story.' And my mother, as a joke, would tell him all the family legends, the passionate adventures of his fathers, for thousands of them were mentioned, true and false. It was their reputation that was the undoing of all these men. They got fancies, and then took pride in living up to the fame of their house.

"The little boy would get excited by these terrible or affecting tales, and sometimes he would clap his hands and cry out: 'I, too; I, too, know how to love, better than any of them.'

"Then he began to pay me his court, so timidly, with such grave tenderness, that we laughed at it. Each morning I had flowers picked by him, and each evening, before going to his room, he would kiss my hand, murmuring: 'I love you!'

"I was guilty, very guilty, and I have wept since, unceasingly, doing penance all my life, by remaining an old maid—or rather, an affianced widow, his widow. I amused myself with this childish devotion, even inciting him. I was coquettish, and seductive, as if I were dealing with a grown man, caressing and deceiving. I excited this child. It was a joke to me, and a pleasing diversion to his mother and mine. He was twelve years old! Think of it! Who would have taken seriously this diminutive passion! I kissed him as much as he wished. I even wrote love-letters to him that our mothers read. And he responded with letters of fire, that I still have. He thought our love intimacy was a secret, regarding himself as a man. We had forgotten that he was a Santèze!

"This lasted nearly a year. One evening, in the park, he threw himself down at my knees, kissing the hem of my dress, in a furious burst of passion, repeating: 'I love you! I love

you! I love you! I am dying of love for you. If you ever deceive me, understand, if you ever leave me for another, I shall do as my father did——' And he added in a low voice that gave one the shivers: 'You know what he did!'

"Then, as I remained dumbfounded, he got up and, stretching himself on tiptoe, for I was much taller than he, he repeated in my ear, my name, my first name, 'Geneviève!' in a voice so sweet, so pretty, so tender that I trembled to my very feet.

"I stammered: 'Let us return to the house!' He said nothing further, but followed me. As we were going up the steps, he stopped me and said: 'You know if you abandon me, I shall kill myself.'

"I understood now that I had gone too far, and immediately became more reserved. When he reproached me for it, one day, I answered him: 'You are now too big for this kind of joking, and too young for serious love. I will wait.'

"I believed myself freed from him.

"He was sent away to school in the autumn. When he returned, the following summer, I had become engaged. He understood at once, and for over a week he looked so preoccupied that I was much disturbed.

"The ninth day, in the morning, I perceived, on rising, a little piece of paper slipped under my door. I seized it and read: 'You have abandoned me, and you know what I said. You have ordered my death. As I do not wish to be found by anyone but you, come into the park, to the place where last year I said that I loved you, and look up.'

"I felt myself becoming mad. I dressed as quickly as possible, and ran, so that I nearly fell exhausted, to the designated spot. His little school-cap was on the ground in the mud. It had rained all night. I raised my eyes and saw something swinging amongst the leaves, for there was a wind blowing, a strong wind.

"After that, I knew nothing of what I did. I must have shouted, fainted, perhaps, and fallen, then got up and run to

the house. I came to my senses in bed, with my mother at my side.

"I at first believed that I had dreamed all this in a frightful delirium. I muttered: 'And he, he—Gontran?' They did not answer.

"It was all true.

"I dared not look at him again, but I asked for a lock of his blond hair. Here—it—is——" And the old lady held out her hand in a gesture of despair.

Then, she used her handkerchief several times, and dried her eyes, and continued: "I broke off my engagement without saying why—and I—have remained always the—widow of this child of thirteen." Then her head fell upon her breast and she wept pensively for a long time.

And, as they dispersed to their rooms for the night, a burly huntsman, whose quiet she had disturbed somewhat, whispered in the ear of his neighbour:

"What a misfortune to be so sentimental! Don't you think so?"

MADemoiselle COCOTTE

WE WERE ABOUT TO LEAVE THE ASYLUM WHEN I NOTICED IN a corner of the courtyard a tall, thin man, obstinately going through the motions of calling an imaginary dog. He would call out, in sweet, tender tones: "Cocotte, my little Cocotte, come here, Cocotte, come here, my beauty," striking his leg, as one does to attract the attention of an animal. I said to the doctor:

"What is the matter with him?"

He replied:

"Oh, that is not an interesting case. He is a coachman called François, who went mad after drowning his dog."

I insisted:

"Do tell me his story. The most simple and humble things sometimes strike most to our hearts."

And here is the adventure of this man, which became known through a groom, his comrade.

In the suburbs of Paris lived a rich, middle-class family. They lived in a fashionable villa in the midst of a park, on the bank of the Seine. Their coachman was this François, a country boy, a little awkward, with a good heart, but simple and easily duped.

When he was returning one evening to his master's house, a dog began to follow him. At first he took no notice of it, but the persistence of the beast walking at his heels caused him finally to turn around. He looked to see if he knew this dog. No, he had never seen it before.

The dog was frightfully thin and had great hanging dugs. She trotted behind the man with a woeful, famished look, her

tail between her legs, her ears close to her head, and stopped when he stopped, starting again when he started.

He tried to drive away this skeleton of a beast: "Get out! Go away! Go, now! Hou! Hou!" She would run away a few steps and then sit down waiting; then, when the coachman started on again, she followed behind him.

He pretended to pick up stones. The animal fled a little way with a great shaking of the flabby dugs, but followed again as soon as the man turned his back.

Then the coachman took pity and called her. The dog approached timidly, her back bent in a circle, and all the ribs showing under the skin. The man stroked these protruding bones and, moved by the misery of the beast, said: "Come along, then!" Immediately she wagged her tail; she felt that she was welcome, adopted; and instead of staying at her new master's heels, she began to run ahead of him.

He installed her on some straw in his stable, then ran to the kitchen in search of bread. When she had eaten her fill, she went to sleep, curled up in a ring.

The next day the coachman told his master, who allowed him to keep the animal. She was a good beast, intelligent and faithful, affectionate and gentle.

But soon they discovered in her a terrible fault. She was inflamed with love from one end of the year to the other. In a short time she had made the acquaintance of every dog about the country, and they roamed about the place day and night. With the indifference of a harlot, she shared her favours with them, feigning to like each one best, dragging behind her a veritable pack composed of many different models of the barking race, some as large as a fist, others as tall as an ass. She took them on interminable walks along the roads, and when she stopped to rest in the shade, they made a circle about her and looked at her with tongues hanging out.

The people of the country considered her a phenomenon;

they had never seen anything like it. The vet. could not understand it.

When she returned to the stable in the evening, the crowd of dogs besieged the house. They wormed their way through every crevice in the hedge which inclosed the park, devastated the flower-beds, broke down the flowers, dug holes in the clumps of plants, exasperating the gardener. They would howl the whole night about the building where their friend lodged, and nothing could persuade them to go away.

In the daytime, they even entered the house. It was an invasion, a plague, a calamity. At every moment the people of the house met on the staircase, and even in the rooms, little yellow pug-dogs with bushy tails, hunting dogs, bulldogs, wandering Pomeranians with dirty skins, homeless vagabonds, and enormous Newfoundland dogs, which frightened the children.

All the unknown dogs for ten miles around came, from one knew not where, and lived, no one knew how, and then disappeared.

Nevertheless, François adored Cocotte. He had called her Cocotte, without malice, although she well deserved the name. And he repeated over and over again: "That dog is human. It only lacks speech."

He had a magnificent collar in red leather made for her, which bore these words, engraved on a copper plate: "Mademoiselle Cocotte, the property of François, the coachman."

She became enormous. She was now as fat as she had once been thin, her body puffed out, under it still hung the long, swaying dugs. She had fattened suddenly and walked with difficulty, her paws wide apart, after the fashion of people that are too stout, her mouth open for breath, and she became exhausted as soon as she tried to run.

She showed a phenomenal fecundity, producing, four times a year, a litter of little animals, belonging to all varieties of

the canine race. François, after having chosen the one he would leave her "to take the milk," would pick up the others in his stable apron and pitilessly throw them into the river.

Soon the cook joined her complaints to those of the gardener. She found dogs under her kitchen range, in the cupboards, and in the coal-bin, and they stole everything they could see.

The master lost his patience and ordered François to get rid of Cocotte. The man was inconsolable, and tried to place her somewhere. No one wanted her. Then he resolved to lose her, and put her in charge of a car-driver who was to leave her in the country the other side of Paris, near Joinville-le-Pont.

That same evening Cocotte was back.

It became necessary to take stern measures. For the sum of five francs, they persuaded the guard on a train to Havre to take her. He was to let her loose when they arrived.

At the end of three days, she appeared again in her stable, harassed, emaciated, torn and exhausted.

The master took pity on her, and did not insist.

But the dogs soon returned in greater numbers than ever, and were more provoking. And as a great dinner was being given one evening, a truffled fowl was carried off by a dog, under the nose of the cook, who did not dare to take it away.

This time the master was angry, and calling François, said to him hotly: "If you don't drown this beast before to-morrow morning, I shall fire you out, do you understand?"

The man was thunderstruck, but he went up to his room to pack his trunk, preferring to leave his job. Then he thought that he would not be likely to get in anywhere else, dragging this unwelcome beast behind him; he remembered that he was in a good house, well paid and well fed; and he said to himself that it was not worth while giving up all this for a dog. He thought of his own interests and ended by resolving to get rid of Cocotte at dawn the next day.

However, he slept badly. At daybreak he was up; and, taking a strong rope, he went in search of the dog. She

arose slowly, shook herself, stretched her limbs, and came to greet her master. Then his courage failed and he began to stroke her tenderly, smoothing her long ears, kissing her on the muzzle, lavishing upon her all the loving names that he could think of.

A neighbouring clock struck six ; he could delay no longer. He opened the door ; " Come," said he. The beast wagged her tail, understanding only that she was going out.

They reached the bank and he chose a place where the water seemed deepest. Then he tied one end of the cord to the beautiful leather collar, and taking a great stone, attached it to the other end. Then he seized Cocotte in his arms and kissed her furiously, as one does when taking leave of a person. Then he held her tight around the neck, fondling her and calling her " My pretty Cocotte, my little Cocotte," and she responded as best she could, growling with pleasure.

Ten times he tried to throw her in, and each time his courage failed him.

Then, abruptly, he decided to do it, and, with all his force, hurled her as far as possible. She tried at first to swim, as she did when taking a bath, but her head, dragged by the stone, went under again and again. She threw her master a look of despair, a human look, battling, as a person does when drowning. Then, the whole front part of the body sank while the hind paws kicked madly out of the water ; then they disappeared also.

For five minutes bubbles of air came to the surface, as if the river had begun to boil. And François, haggard, and at his wits' end, with palpitating heart, believed he saw Cocotte writhing in the slime. And he said to himself, with the simplicity of a peasant : " What does she think of me now, the poor beast ? "

He almost became mad. He was sick for a month, and each night saw the dog again. He felt her licking his hands ; he heard her bark.

They had to call a physician. Finally he grew better ; and his master and mistress took him to their estate at Biessard, near Rouen.

There he was still on the bank of the Seine. He began to go bathing. Every morning he went down with the groom to swim across the river.

One day, as they were amusing themselves splashing in the water, François suddenly cried out to his companion :

"Look at what is coming towards us. I am going to make you taste a cutlet."

It was an enormous carcass, swelled and stripped of its hair, its paws moving forward in the air, following the current.

François approached it, and continued to joke :

"By God, it is rather high ! What a catch, my boy, there is plenty of meat on it !"

And he turned around it, keeping at a distance from the great, putrefying body.

Then, suddenly, he was silent, and looked at it in strange fashion. He approached it again, this time as if he were going to touch it. He carefully examined the collar, then put out his hand and grasped the neck, twirled it around, drew it towards him, and read upon the green copper that still adhered to the discoloured leather : "Mademoiselle Cocotte, the property of François, the coachman."

The dead dog had found her master, sixty miles from their home !

He uttered a fearful cry, and began to swim with all his might towards the bank, shouting all the way. And when he reached the land, he ran off wildly, stark-naked, through the country. He was mad !

THE JEWELS

MONSIEUR LANTIN HAVING MET THE YOUNG WOMAN AT A *soirée*, at the home of the assistant of his department, had fallen head over ears in love with her. She was the daughter of a country tax-collector who had died some years previously. She had come to live in Paris, with her mother, who visited a few families in the neighbourhood in the hope of finding a husband for the young lady. They were poor and honest, gentle and quiet.

The young girl was a perfect type of the virtuous woman to whom every sensible young man dreams of one day entrusting his life. Her simple beauty had the charm of angelic modesty, and the imperceptible smile which constantly hovered about her lips seemed to be the reflection of her soul. Everybody sang her praises. People were never tired of saying: "Happy the man who wins her. He could not find a better wife."

M. Lantin, at the time Chief Clerk in the Ministry of the Interior, with a yearly salary of three thousand five hundred francs, proposed for her hand and married her.

He was unspeakably happy with her; she governed his household so cleverly and economically that they seemed to live in luxury. She was full of attentions for her husband, spoiling and coaxing him, and the charm of her person was so great that six years after their marriage M. Lantin discovered that he loved his wife even more than during the first days when he knew her.

He found fault with only two of her tastes: her love for the theatre, and for false jewelry. Her friends (she was acquainted with some petty officials' wives) frequently procured for her

a box at the theatre for popular plays, and even for the first nights ; and she dragged her husband, whether he liked it or not, to these amusements, which tired him excessively after his day's work.

So he begged his wife to go to the theatre with some lady of her acquaintance, who would bring her home afterwards. It was a long time before she gave in, as she thought this arrangement was not quite respectable. But finally, to please him, she consented, and he was very grateful.

Now, this love for the theatre soon aroused in her the desire to adorn her person. True, her costumes remained quite simple, and always in good taste, but unpretentious ; and her tender grace, her irresistible, humble, smiling charm, seemed to be enhanced by the simplicity of her dresses. But she soon began to ornament her ears with huge rhinestones, which glittered and sparkled like real diamonds. She wore strings of false pearls, bracelets of imitation gold, and combs ornamented with glass made up to look like real stones.

Her husband, who was rather shocked by this love of show, frequently used to say :

"My dear, as you cannot afford to buy real gems, you ought to appear adorned with your beauty and modesty alone, those are the rarest ornaments of your sex."

But she would smile sweetly, and say :

"What can I do ? I like it. It is my only weakness. I know you are right but we cannot change our natures. I should love to have jewelry."

Then she would roll the pearl necklaces around her fingers, and make the cut-glass flash, saying :

"Look, are they not lovely ? One would swear they were real."

He would then answer, smilingly :

"You have the tastes of a gipsy, my dear."

Often in the evening, when they were enjoying a *tête-à-tête* by the fireside, she would place on the tea-table the leather

box containing the "trash," as M. Lantin called it. She would examine the false gems with a passionate attention as though she were tasting a deep and secret joy; and she often insisted on passing a necklace around her husband's neck, and then, laughing heartily, she would exclaim: "How funny you look!" Then she would throw herself into his arms and kiss him passionately.

One evening in winter when she went to the opera, she returned chilled through and through. The next morning she coughed, and eight days later she died of inflammation of the lungs.

Lantin nearly followed her to the grave. His despair was so great that his hair became white in one month. He wept from morning to night, his heart torn with intolerable grief, and his mind haunted by the remembrance, the smile, the voice—by every charm of his dead wife.

Time did not assuage his grief. Often during office hours, while his colleagues were discussing the topics of the day, his face would begin to twitch, his eyes would suddenly fill with tears, and with distorted features he would begin to sob. He had kept his wife's room untouched, and here he would seclude himself daily and think of her, while all the furniture, even her clothes, remained as they were the last day she was alive.

But life soon became a struggle. His income, which in the hands of his wife had covered all household expenses, was now no longer sufficient for his own immediate wants; and he wondered how she could have managed to buy such excellent wines, and such rare delicacies, things which he could no longer procure with his modest resources.

He incurred some debts and he pursued money as people do who are reduced to expedients. One morning, finding himself without a sou in his pocket, a whole week before the end of the month, he resolved to sell something, and, immediately, the thought occurred to him of disposing of his wife's

paste jewels. He cherished in his heart a sort of rancour against the false gems, which had always irritated him in the past. The very sight of them spoiled somewhat the memory of his lost darling.

He searched for a long time in the heap of glittering things, for to the last days of her life she had continued obstinately to make purchases, bringing home new gems almost every evening. He decided to sell the heavy necklace which she seemed to prefer, and which, he thought, ought to be worth about six or seven francs; for although paste, it was, nevertheless, of very fine workmanship.

He put it in his pocket and started out for the Ministry, following the Boulevards in search of a jeweller's shop. He entered the first one he saw; feeling a little ashamed to expose his poverty, and also to offer such a worthless article for sale.

"Sir," said he to the merchant, "I would like to know what this is worth."

The man took the necklace, examined it, turned it over, weighed it, used his magnifying-glass, called his clerk and made some remarks in an undertone; then he put the ornament back on the counter, and looked at it from a distance to judge of the effect.

M. Lantin was annoyed by all this ritual and was on the point of saying: "Oh! I know well enough it is not worth anything," when the jeweller said: "Sir, that necklace is worth from twelve to fifteen thousand francs; but I could not buy it unless you tell me exactly where it comes from."

The widower opened his eyes wide and remained gaping, unable to grasp the merchant's meaning. Finally he stammered: "You say—are you sure?" The other replied dryly: "You can look elsewhere and see if anyone will offer you more. I consider it is worth fifteen thousand at the most. Come back here if you cannot do better."

M. Lantin, gaping with astonishment, took up the necklace

and went out, in obedience to a vague desire to be alone and to think.

Once outside, he felt inclined to laugh, and said to himself: "The idiot! Had I only taken him at his word! That jeweller cannot distinguish real diamonds from paste."

A few minutes after, he entered another store in the Rue de la Paix. As soon as the proprietor glanced at the necklace, he cried out:

"Ah, *parbleu!* I know it well; it was bought here."

M. Lantin was disturbed, and asked:

"How much is it worth?"

"Well, I sold it for twenty-five thousand francs. I am willing to take it back for eighteen thousand when you inform me, according to our legal formality, how it comes to be in your possession."

This time M. Lantin sat down, paralysed with astonishment. He replied:

"But—but—examine it well. Until this moment I was under the impression that it was paste."

Said the jeweller:

"What is your name, sir?"

"Lantin—I am a clerk in the Ministry of the Interior. I live at No. 16 Rue des Martyrs."

The merchant opened his books, looked through them and said: "That necklace was sent to Mme Lantin's address, 16 Rue des Martyrs, July 20, 1876."

The two men looked into each other's eyes—the widower speechless with astonishment, the jeweller scenting a thief. The latter broke the silence by saying:

"Will you leave this necklace here for twenty-four hours? I will give you a receipt."

"Certainly," answered M. Lantin, hastily. Then, putting the ticket in his pocket, he went out.

He crossed the street, walked up it again, saw that he had taken the wrong way, went down again to the Tuileries Gardens,

crossed the Seine, noticed he had again gone wrong, and returned to the Champs Élysées, his mind a complete blank. He tried to argue it out, to understand. His wife could not afford to purchase such a costly ornament. Certainly not. But, then, it must have been a present!—a present!—a present from whom? Why was it given her?

He stopped and remained standing in the middle of the avenue. A horrible doubt entered his mind—she? Then all the other gems must have been presents, too! The earth seemed to tremble beneath him—the tree before him was falling—throwing up his arms, he fell to the ground, unconscious. He recovered his senses in a pharmacy into which the passers-by had taken him.

He told them to take him home, where he shut himself up in his room. He wept until nightfall, biting a handkerchief so as not to shriek. Finally, overcome with grief and fatigue, he threw himself on the bed, where he slept heavily.

A ray of sunlight awoke him and he arose and prepared to go to the office. It was hard to work after such a shock. He sent a letter to his chief requesting to be excused. Then he remembered that he had to return to the jeweller's. He was filled with shame, and remained sunk in thought for a long time, but he could not leave the necklace with that man. So he dressed and went out.

It was a lovely day; a clear blue sky spread over the smiling city. Strollers with nothing to do were walking about with their hands in their pockets.

Observing them, Lantin said to himself: "The rich, indeed, are happy. With money it is possible to forget even the deepest sorrow. One can go where one pleases; one can travel and forget. Oh! if I were only rich!"

He began to feel hungry, but his pocket was empty. He again remembered the necklace. Eighteen thousand francs! Eighteen thousand francs! What a sum!

He soon arrived in the Rue de la Paix, and walked up and

down opposite the jeweller's. Eighteen thousand francs! Twenty times he almost went in, but shame kept him back. He was hungry, however—very hungry, and had not a cent in his pocket. He decided quickly, ran across the street in order not to have time for reflection, and entered the shop.

As soon as he saw him the proprietor came forward, and politely offered him a chair; even the clerks came and looked in his direction, with a knowing smile about their eyes and lips.

"I have made inquiries," said the jeweller, "and if you are still resolved to dispose of the gems, I am ready to pay you the price I offered."

"Certainly," stammered M. Lantin.

Whereupon the proprietor took from a drawer eighteen large bills, counted and handed them to Lantin, who signed a receipt and with a trembling hand put the money into his pocket.

As he was about to leave the store, he turned toward the merchant, who still wore the same smile, and lowering his eyes, said:

"I have—I have others gems which I have inherited from the same person. Will you buy them also?"

The merchant bowed: "Certainly, sir."

One of the clerks retired, unable to contain his laughter. Another blew his nose violently.

Lantin, impassive, blushing and serious, replied: "I will bring them to you."

He took a cab to go and fetch the jewels. An hour later, when he returned to the shop, he had not yet breakfasted. They began to examine each item separately, estimating the value of every one. Almost all of them had been bought there. Lantin now began to argue about the valuations, lost his temper, and insisted upon seeing the records of the sales. He became more domineering as the figures increased.

The large diamond ear-rings were worth twenty thousand francs; the bracelets, thirty-five thousand; the rings, brooches

and medallions, sixteen thousand ; a set of emeralds and sapphires, fourteen thousand ; a gold chain with solitaire pendant, in the form of a necklace, forty thousand—making a total sum of one hundred and ninety-six thousand francs.

The jeweller remarked jokingly :

“ These come from someone who invested all her savings in precious stones.”

M. Lantin replied, seriously :

“ It is as good a way as any other of investing one's money.”

And he went off after having arranged with the purchaser to have another expert's opinion the next day.

When he got to the street he looked at the Colonne Vendôme and felt tempted to climb it, as if it were a greasy pole. He felt so happy he could have played leap-frog with the statue of the Emperor, perched up there in the sky.

He lunched at Voisin's and drank wine at twenty francs a bottle. Then he hired a carriage and drove around the Bois, and as he scanned the various turnouts with a contemptuous air he could hardly refrain from crying out to the passers-by :

“ I, too, am rich!—I am worth two hundred thousand francs.”

Suddenly he thought of the Ministry. He drove up to the office, and deliberately entered the office of his chief, saying :

“ Sir, I have come to resign my position. I have just inherited three hundred thousand francs.”

He shook hands with his former colleagues and confided to them some of his projects for his new life ; then he went off to dine at the Café Anglais.

Finding himself beside a gentleman of aristocratic bearing, he could not resist the desire to inform him, with some pride, that he had just inherited a fortune of four hundred thousand francs.

For the first time in his life he was not bored at the theatre, and spent the rest of the night with some women.

Six months afterwards he married again. His second wife was a very virtuous woman, but very cantankerous. She made him suffer a great deal.

AN APPARITION

WE WERE SPEAKING OF SEQUESTRATION A PROPOS OF A recent lawsuit. It was at the close of an evening amongst friends, at an old house in the Rue de Grenelle, and each of us had a story to tell, a story alleged to be true. Then, the old Marquis de la Tour Samuel, who was eighty-two, rose, and, leaning on the mantelpiece, said, in somewhat shaky tones :

"I also know something strange, so strange that it has been an obsession all my life. It is now fifty-six years since the incident occurred, and yet not a month has passed in which I have not seen it again in a dream. The mark, the imprint of fear, if you can understand me, has remained with me ever since that day. For ten minutes I experienced such horrible fright that, ever since, a sort of constant terror is in my soul. Unexpected noises make me shudder to the bottom of my soul and objects half-seen in the gloom of night inspire me with a mad desire to take flight. In short, at night I am afraid.

"Ah, no ! I would not have admitted that before having reached my present age ! Now I can say anything. At eighty-two years of age, I do not feel compelled to be brave in the presence of imaginary dangers. I have never receded before real danger.

"The affair upset me so completely, and caused me such deep and mysterious and terrible distress, that I never spoke of it to anyone. I have kept it down in the depths of my being, in those depths where painful secrets are kept, the shameful secrets and all the unconfessed weaknesses of our lives. I will not tell it to you exactly as it happened, without any attempt at explanation. There is no doubt it can be

explained, unless I was mad at the time. But I was not mad, and I will prove it. You may think what you like. Here are the simple facts :

“It was in 1827, in the month of July. I was stationed at Rouen. One day, as I was walking along the quay, I met a man whom I thought I recognised, without being able to recall exactly who he was. Instinctively, I made a movement to stop ; the stranger perceived it, looked at me, and fell into my arms.

“He was a friend of my youth to whom I had been deeply attached. For five years I had not seen him, and he seemed to have aged half a century. His hair was quite white, and he walked with a stoop as though completely worn out. He understood my surprise, and told me his life. A misfortune had shattered it.

“Having fallen madly in love with a young girl, he had married her, but, after a year of superhuman happiness and of passionate love, she died suddenly of heart failure, of love, very probably. He had left his château on the very day of her burial and had come to live in his house at Rouen. There he lived, desperate and solitary, consumed by grief, and so miserable that he thought only of suicide.

“‘Now that I have found you again,’ said he, ‘I will ask you to render me an important service, to go to my old home and get for me, from the desk of my bedroom—our bedroom—some papers which I greatly need. I cannot send a servant or a lawyer, as complete discretion and absolute silence are necessary. As for myself, nothing on earth would induce me to re-enter that house. I will give you the key of the room, which I myself locked on leaving, and the key of my desk—also a note to my gardener, telling him to open the château for you. But come and breakfast with me to-morrow, and we will arrange all that.’

“I promised to do him the slight favour he asked. For that matter, it was nothing of a trip, his property being but a few

miles distant from Rouen and easily reached in an hour on horseback.

"At ten o'clock the following day I was at his house, and we breakfasted alone together, but he scarcely spoke.

"He begged me to pardon him; the thought of the visit I was about to make to that room, the scene of his dead happiness, overwhelmed him, he said. He, indeed, seemed singularly agitated and preoccupied, as though some mysterious struggle were taking place in his soul.

"At last, he explained to me exactly what I had to do. It was very simple. I was to take two packages of letters and a roll of papers from the first drawer on the right of the desk of which I had the key. He added, 'I need not beg you to refrain from glancing at them.'

"I was wounded at that remark, and told him so somewhat sharply. He stammered, 'Forgive me, I suffer so,' and he began to weep.

"I took leave of him about one o'clock to accomplish my mission.

"The weather was glorious, and I cantered over the fields, listening to the songs of the larks and the rhythmical striking of my sword against my boot. Then I entered the forest and walked my horse. Branches of trees caressed my face as I passed, and, now and then, I caught a leaf with my teeth, and chewed it greedily, from that sheer joy of living which inexplicably fills one with a sense of tumultuous, impalpable happiness, a sort of intoxication of strength.

"As I approached the château, I looked in my pocket for the letter I had for the gardener, and was astonished at finding it sealed. I was so surprised and irritated that I was about to turn back without having fulfilled my promise, but thought that I should thereby display undue susceptibility. My friend might easily have closed the envelope without noticing that he did so, in his troubled state of mind.

"The manor seemed to have been abandoned for twenty

years. The gate was open and in such a state of decay that one wondered how it stood upright ; the paths were overgrown with grass, and the flower-beds were no longer distinguishable from the lawn.

"The noise I made by tapping loudly on a shutter brought an old man from a side door, who seemed stunned with astonishment at seeing me. On receiving my letter, he read it, re-read it, turned it over and over, looked me up and down, put the paper in his pocket, and finally asked :

" ' Well ! what is it you want ? ' "

"I replied shortly : ' You ought to know, since you have just read your master's orders. I wish to enter the château. ' "

"He seemed overcome. ' Then you are going into . . . into her room ? ' "

"I began to lose patience : ' See here ! Do you propose to cross-examine me ? ' "

"He stammered in confusion : ' No—sir—but it is because—that is, it has not been opened since—since the—death. If you will be kind enough to wait for five minutes, I will go to—to see if—— ' "

"I interrupted him, angrily : ' Look here, what are you driving at ? You cannot enter the room, since I have the key ! ' "

"He had no more to say. ' Then, sir, I will show you the way. ' "

" ' Show me the staircase and leave me. I'll find my way without you. ' "

" ' But—sir—indeed—— ' "

"This time I became really angry : ' Now be quiet or you'll know the reason why. ' I pushed him aside, and went into the house.

"I first went through the kitchen ; then two rooms occupied by the servant and his wife ; next, by a wide hall, I reached the stairs, which I mounted, and recognised the door indicated by my friend.

"I easily opened it and entered. The apartment was so

dark that, at first, I could distinguish nothing. I stopped short, my nostrils penetrated by the disagreeable, mouldy odour of unoccupied rooms, of dead rooms. Then, as my eyes slowly became accustomed to the darkness, I saw plainly enough, a large disordered bedroom, the bed without sheets, but still retaining its mattresses and pillows, on one of which was a deep impression of an elbow or a head, as though someone had recently rested there.

"The chairs all seemed out of place. I noticed that a door, doubtless that of a closet, had remained half open.

"I first went to the window, which I opened to let in the light; but the fastenings of the shutters had grown so rusty that I could not move them. I even tried to break them with my sword, but without success. As I was growing irritated over my useless efforts, and could now see fairly well in the obscurity, I renounced the idea of getting more light and went over to the writing-table.

"I sat down in an arm-chair, let down the lid of the desk and opened the drawer that had been indicated. It was full to the top. I needed only three packages, which I knew how to recognise, and began searching for them.

"I was straining my eyes in the effort to read the superscriptions, when I seemed to hear, or rather feel, something rustle behind me. I paid no attention, believing that a draught from the window was moving some drapery: But, in a minute or so, another movement, almost imperceptible, sent a strangely disagreeable little shiver over my skin. It was so stupid to be affected, even slightly, that self-respect prevented my turning around. I had then found the second packet I needed and was about to lay my hand on the third when a long and painful sigh, uttered just over my shoulder, made me bound like a madman from my seat and land several feet away. As I jumped I had turned about, my hand on the hilt of my sword, and, truly, had I not felt it at my side, I should have taken to my heels like a coward.

"A tall woman, dressed in white, stood gazing at me from the back of the chair where I had been sitting an instant before.

"Such a shudder ran through all my limbs that I nearly fell backward. No one can understand unless he has felt it, that frightful, unreasoning terror! The mind becomes vague; the heart ceases to beat; the entire body grows as limp as a sponge, as if one's life were ebbing away.

"I do not believe in ghosts, nevertheless I completely gave way to a hideous fear of the dead; and I suffered more in those few moments than in all the rest of my life, from the irresistible anguish of supernatural fright. If she had not spoken, I should have died, perhaps! But she spoke, she spoke in a sweet, sad voice, that set my nerves vibrating. I dare not say that I became master of myself and recovered my reason. No! I was so frightened that I scarcely knew what I was doing; but a certain innate pride, a remnant of soldierly instinct, made me, almost in spite of myself, maintain a creditable countenance. I was posing to myself, I suppose, and to her, whoever she was, woman or ghost. Afterwards I realised all this, for I assure you that, at the time of the apparition, I thought of nothing. I was afraid.

"She said: 'Oh! sir, you can render me a great service.'

"I tried to reply, but it was impossible for me to pronounce a word. Only a vague sound came from my throat.

"She continued: 'Will you? You can save me, cure me. I suffer frightfully. I suffer, oh! how I suffer!' and she slowly seated herself in my arm-chair.

"'Will you?' she said, looking at me.

"I replied 'Yes' by a nod, my voice still being paralysed.

"Then she held out to me a tortoise-shell comb, and murmured:

"'Comb my hair, oh! comb my hair; that will cure me; it must be combed. Look at my head—how I suffer; and my hair hurts me so!'

"Her hair, unbound, very long and very black, it seemed

to me, hung over the back of the chair and touched the floor.

"Why did I receive that comb with a shudder, and why did I take in my hands the long, black hair which gave to my skin a gruesome, cold sensation, as though I were handling snakes? I cannot tell.

"That sensation has remained in my fingers and I still tremble when I think of it.

"I combed her hair. I handled, I know not how, those icy locks. I twisted, knotted, and loosened them. She sighed and bowed her head, seeming to be happy. Suddenly she said: 'Thank you!' snatched the comb from my hands, and fled by the door that I had noticed ajar.

"Left alone, I experienced for several seconds the frightened agitation of one who awakens from a nightmare. At length I regained my full senses; I ran to the window, and with a mighty effort burst open the shutters, letting a flood of light into the room. Immediately I sprang to the door by which she had departed. I found it closed and immovable!

"Then a mad desire to flee came on me like a panic, the panic which soldiers know in battle. I seized the three packets of letters on the open desk; ran from the room, dashed down the stairs four steps at a time, found myself outside, I know not how, and seeing my horse a few steps off, leaped into the saddle and galloped away.

"I stopped only when I reached Rouen and my own house. Throwing the bridle to my orderly, I fled to my room, where I shut myself in to think.

"For an hour I anxiously wondered whether I had not been the victim of a hallucination. Surely I had had one of those incomprehensible nervous shocks, one of those mental frights which give rise to miracles, to which the supernatural owes its power.

"I was about to believe I had seen a vision, had a hallucination, when I approached the window. My eyes fell, by chance,

upon my breast. My military cape was covered with hairs ; the long hairs of a woman, which had caught in the buttons ! One by one, with trembling fingers, I plucked them off and threw them away.

"I then called my orderly. I was too disturbed, too upset to go and see my friend that day, and I also wished to reflect more fully upon what I ought to tell him. I sent him his letters, for which he gave the soldier a receipt. He asked after me most particularly. He was told I was ill, that I had had sunstroke or something. He seemed to be exceedingly anxious. Next morning at dawn I went to him, determined to tell him the truth. He had gone out the evening before and had not yet returned. I called again during the day ; my friend was still absent. I waited for a week. He did not appear. Then I notified the authorities. A search was instituted, but not the slightest trace of his whereabouts or manner of disappearance was discovered.

"A minute inspection was made of the abandoned château. Nothing of a suspicious character was discovered. There was no indication that a woman had been concealed there.

"The inquiry led to nothing, and the search was stopped, and for fifty-six years I have heard nothing ; I know no more than before."

THE DOOR

“AH!” EXCLAIMED KARL MASSOULIGNY, “THE QUESTION OF complaisant husbands is a difficult one. I have seen many kinds, and yet I am unable to give an opinion about any of them. I have often tried to determine whether they are blind, weak, or clairvoyant. I believe that there are some who belong to each of these categories.

“Let us quickly pass over the blind ones. They cannot rightly be called complaisant, since they do not know, but they are good creatures who cannot see farther than their noses. It is a curious and interesting thing to notice the ease with which men—all men, and even women, all women—can be deceived. We are taken in by the slightest trick of those about us—of our children, our friends, our servants, our tradespeople. Human nature is credulous, and in order to suspect, guess and overcome the deceit of others, we do not display one-tenth of the finesse which we use when we, in turn, wish to deceive someone else.

“The clairvoyant husbands can be divided into three classes. Those who have some interest, pecuniary, ambitious or otherwise, in their wife having a lover, or lovers. These ask only that appearances be observed more or less, and they are satisfied. Next come those who get angry. What a beautiful novel one could write about them! Finally the weak ones! Those who are afraid of scandal.

“There are also those who are powerless, or, rather, tired, who escape the conjugal bed from fear of ataxia or apoplexy, who are satisfied to see a friend run these risks.

“But I have met a husband of a rare species, who guarded against the common accident in a strange and witty manner.

"In Paris I had made the acquaintance of an elegant, fashionable couple very much in demand. The woman, nervous, tall, slender, courted, was supposed to have had many adventures. She pleased me with her wit, and I believe that I pleased her, also. I courted her, a trial courting to which she answered with evident provocations. Soon we arrived at tender glances, pressures of the hands, all the little gallantries which precede the great attack.

"Nevertheless, I hesitated. I believe that, as a rule, the majority of society intrigues, however short they may be, are not worth the trouble which they give us and the difficulties which may arise. I therefore mentally compared the advantages and disadvantages which I could expect, and I thought I noticed that the husband suspected me and was watching me.

"One evening, at a ball, as I was saying tender things to the young woman in a little room leading from the big hall where the dancing was going on, I noticed in a mirror the reflection of someone who was watching us. It was he. Our looks met, and then I saw him turn his head and walk away.

"I murmured: 'Your husband is spying on us.'

"She seemed dumbfounded, and asked: 'My husband?'

"'Yes, he has been watching us for some time.'

"'Nonsense! Are you sure?'

"'Very sure.'

"'How strange! On the contrary, he is usually very pleasant to all my friends.'

"'Perhaps he guessed that I love you!'

"'Nonsense! You are not the first one to pay attention to me. Every woman who is a little in view drags behind her a troop of admirers.'

"'Yes. But I love you deeply.'

"'Admitting that that is true, does a husband ever guess those things?'

"'Then he is not jealous?'

"'No—no!'

"She thought for an instant, and then continued: 'No. I do not think that I ever noticed any jealousy on his part.'

"'Has he never—watched you?'

"'No. As I said, he is always agreeable to my friends.'

"From that day my courting became much more assiduous. The woman did not please me any more than before, but the probable jealousy of her husband tempted me greatly.

"As for her, I judged her coolly and clearly. She had a certain worldly charm, due to a quick, gay, amiable, and superficial mind, but no real, deep attraction. She was, as I have already said, nervous, all on the surface and very elegant. How can I explain myself? She was . . . a decoration, not a home.

"One day, after taking dinner with her, her husband said to me, just as I was leaving: 'My dear friend' (he now called me 'friend'), 'we soon leave for the country. It is a great pleasure for my wife and myself to receive the people whom we like. We would like to have you spend a month with us. It would be very nice of you to do so.'

"I was dumbfounded, but I accepted.

"A month later I arrived at their estate of Vertcresson, in Touraine. They were waiting for me at the station, two miles from the château. There were three of them, she, the husband, and a gentleman unknown to me, the Comte de Morterade, to whom I was introduced. He appeared to be delighted to make my acquaintance, and the strangest ideas passed through my mind while we trotted along the beautiful road between two hedges of green. I was saying to myself: 'Let's see, what can this mean? Here is a husband who cannot doubt that his wife and I are on more than friendly terms, and yet he invites me to his house, receives me like an old friend, and seems to say: 'Go ahead, my friend, the road is clear!'

"Then I am introduced to a very pleasant gentleman, who seems already to have settled down in the house, and . . . and

who is perhaps trying to get out of it, and who seems as pleased at my arrival as the husband himself.

"Is it some former lover who wishes to retire? One might think so. But, then, would these two men tacitly have come to one of those infamous little arrangements so common in society? And without consulting me, it is proposed that I shall quietly enter into the association and take up the succession. All hands and arms are held out to me. All doors and hearts are open to me.

"And she? An enigma. She cannot be ignorant of everything. However? . . . however? . . . there it is . . . I am quite at sea!

"The dinner was very gay and friendly. On leaving the table the husband and his friend began to play cards, while I went out on the steps to look at the moonlight with Madame. She seemed to be greatly moved by nature, and I judged that the moment of my happiness was near. That evening she was really delightful. The country seemed to make her more tender, or rather more languishing. Her long, slender figure looked pretty on this stone step beside a great vase in which grew some flowers. I felt like taking her out under the trees, throwing myself at her feet, and speaking to her words of love

"Her husband's voice called: 'Louise!'

"'Yes, my dear.'

"'You are forgetting the tea.'

"'I am coming, dear.'

"We returned to the house, and she served tea. The two men, having finished their game of cards, were obviously sleepy. We had to go to our rooms. I did not get to sleep till late, and then I slept badly.

"An excursion was decided upon for the following afternoon, and we went in an open carriage to visit some ruins. She and I were in the back of the vehicle and they were opposite us, with their backs to the driver. The conversation was animated,

agreeable and unconstrained. I am an orphan, and it seemed to me as though I had just found my family, I felt so much at home with them.

"Suddenly, as she had stretched out her foot between her husband's legs, he murmured reproachfully: 'Louise, please don't use up your old shoes yourself. There is no reason for being neater in Paris than in the country.'

"I looked down. She was indeed wearing wornout shoes, and I noticed that her stockings were not pulled up tightly.

"She had blushed and hidden her foot under her dress. The friend was looking out in the distance, with an indifferent and unconcerned look.

"The husband offered me a cigar, which I accepted. For a few days it was impossible for me to be alone with her for two minutes; he was with us everywhere. He was delightful to me.

"One morning he came to get me to take a walk before lunch, and the conversation happened to turn on marriage. I spoke a little about solitude, and about how charming life can be made by a woman. Suddenly he interrupted me, saying: 'My boy, don't talk about things you know nothing about. A woman who has no further reason for loving you will not love you for long. All the little coquetries which make them so exquisite when they do not definitely belong to us cease as soon as they become ours. And then . . . the respectable women . . . that is to say, our wives . . . are . . . are not . . . they lack . . . do not understand their business as women. Do you understand?'

"He said no more, and I could not exactly guess his thoughts.

"Two days after this conversation he called me to his room quite early in order to show me a collection of engravings. I sat in an easy-chair opposite the big door which separated his apartment from his wife's, and behind this door I heard someone walking and moving, and I was thinking very little of the engravings, although I kept exclaiming: 'Oh, charming! delightful! exquisite!'

"He suddenly said: 'Oh, I have a beautiful specimen in the next room. I'll go get it.'

"He ran to the door quickly, and both sides opened as though for a theatrical effect.

"In a large room, all in disorder, in the midst of skirts, collars, blouses lying around on the floor, stood a tall, dried-up creature with her hair hanging. The lower part of her body was covered with an old, worn-out silk petticoat, which clung about her thin hips, and she was standing in front of a mirror brushing some short, sparse blond hairs. Her arms formed two acute angles, and as she turned around in astonishment I saw under a common linen chemise a regular cemetery of ribs, which were hidden from the public gaze by cotton pads.

"The husband naturally uttered an exclamation, and came back, closing the doors, and said with a heart-broken air: 'Gracious! how stupid I am! Oh, how thoughtless! My wife will never forgive me for that!'

"I already felt like thanking him. I left three days later, after cordially shaking hands with the two men and kissing the lady's fingers; she bade me a cold good-bye."

Karl Massouligny was silent. Someone asked: "But what was the friend?"

"I don't know . . . however . . . however, he looked greatly distressed to see me leaving so soon."

THE FATHER

JEAN DE VALNOIX IS A FRIEND OF MINE WHOM I VISIT FROM time to time. He lives in a little house in the woods at the edge of a river. He retired from Paris after leading a wild life for fifteen years. Suddenly he had enough of pleasures, dinners, men, women, cards, everything ; and he came to live in this little place where he had been born.

There are two or three of us who go, from time to time, to spend a fortnight or three weeks with him. He is certainly delighted to see us when we arrive, and pleased to be alone again when we leave. So I went to see him last week, and he received me with open arms. We would spend the time, sometimes together, sometimes alone. Usually he reads and I work during the day-time, and every evening we talk until midnight.

Well, last Tuesday, after a scorching day, towards nine o'clock in the evening we were both of us sitting and watching the water flow at our feet ; we were exchanging very vague ideas about the stars, which were bathing in the current and seemed to swim along ahead of us. Our ideas were very vague, confused, and brief, for our minds are very limited, weak, and powerless. I was growing sentimental about the sun, which dies in the Great Bear. One can only see it on very clear nights, it is so pale. When the sky is the least bit clouded it disappears. We were thinking of the creatures which people these worlds, of their possible forms, of their unthinkable faculties and unknown organs, of the animals and plants of every kind, of all the kingdoms and forms of matter, of all the things which man's dreams can barely touch.

Suddenly a voice called from the distance: "Monsieur, Monsieur!"

Jean answered: "Here I am, Baptiste!"

When the servant had found us he announced: "It's Monsieur's gipsy."

My friend burst out laughing, a thing which he rarely did, then he asked: "Is to-day the nineteenth of July?"

"Yes, Monsieur."

"Very well. Tell her to wait for me. Give her some supper. I'll see her in ten minutes."

When the man had disappeared my friend took me by the arm saying: "Let us walk along slowly, while I tell you this story."

"Seven years ago, when I arrived here, I went out one evening to take a walk in the forest. It was a beautiful day, like to-day, and I was walking along slowly under the great trees, looking at the stars through the leaves, drinking in the quiet restfulness of night and the forest."

"I had just left Paris for ever. I was tired out, more disgusted than I can say by all the foolish, low, and nasty things which I had seen and in which I had participated for fifteen years."

"I walked along for a great distance in this deep forest, following a path which leads to the village of Crouzille, about ten miles from here."

"Suddenly my dog, Bock, a great Saint-Germain, which never left me, stopped short and began to growl. I thought that perhaps a fox, a wolf, or a boar might be in the neighbourhood; I advanced gently on tiptoe, in order to make no noise, but suddenly I heard mournful human cries, plaintive, muffled and moving."

"Surely some murder was being committed. I rushed forward, taking a tight grip on my heavy oak stick, a regular club."

"I was coming nearer to the moans, which now became more

distinct, but strangely muffled. They seemed to be coming from some house, perhaps from the hut of some charcoal burner. Three feet ahead of me Bock was running, stopping, barking, starting again, very excited, and growling all the time. Suddenly another dog, a big black one with burning eyes, barred our progress. I could clearly see his white fangs, which seemed to be shining in his mouth.

"I ran towards him with uplifted stick, but Bock had already jumped, and the two beasts were rolling on the ground with their teeth buried in each other. I went past them and almost bumped into a horse lying in the road. As I stopped, in surprise, to examine the animal, I saw in front of me a wagon, or, rather, a caravan, such as are inhabited by circus people and the itinerant merchants who go from fair to fair.

"The cries were coming from there, frightful and continuous. As the door opened on the other side I turned around this vehicle and rushed up the three wooden steps, ready to jump on the malefactor.

"What I saw seemed so strange to me that I could not understand it at first. A man was kneeling, and seemed to be praying, while in the only bed something impossible to recognise, a half-naked creature, whose face I could not see, was moving, twisting about, and howling. It was a woman in labour.

"As soon as I understood the kind of accident which was the cause of these screams, I made my presence known, and the man, a wild fellow, a Marseillais from his looks and voice, begged me to save him, to save her, promising me with many words an incredible gratitude. I had never seen a birth; I had never helped a female creature, woman, dog, or cat, in such a circumstance, and I naïvely said so, as I stupidly watched this thing which was screaming so in the bed.

"Then when I had gathered my wits again, I asked the grief-stricken man why he did not go to the next village. His horse must have caught in a rut and had broken his leg.

" 'Well, my man,' I exclaimed, 'there are two of us now and we will drag your wife to my house.'

"But the howling dogs forced us to go outside, and we had to separate them by beating them with our sticks, at the risk of killing them. Then the idea struck me to harness them with us, one to the right and the other to the left, in order to help us. In ten minutes everything was ready, and the wagon started forward slowly, shaking the poor, suffering woman each time it bumped over the deep ruts.

"Such a road, my friend! We were going along, panting, groaning, perspiring, slipping, and falling, while our poor dogs puffed along beside us.

"It took three hours to reach the cottage. When we arrived before the door the cries from the wagon had ceased. Mother and child were doing well.

"They were put to bed, and then I had a horse harnessed up in order to go for a physician, while the man, a true Marseillais, reassured, consoled, and triumphant, was stuffing himself with food and getting dead-drunk in order to celebrate this happy birth.

"It was a girl.

"I kept these people with me for a week. The mother, Mademoiselle Elmire, was an extraordinarily lucid fortune-teller, who promised me an interminable life and countless joys.

"The following year, on exactly the same day, towards nightfall, the servant who has just called me came to me in the smoking-room after dinner and said: 'It's the gipsy of last year who has come to thank Monsieur.'

"I had her come into the house, and I was dumbfounded when I saw beside her a tall blond fellow, a man from the North, who bowed and spoke to me as chief of the community. He had heard of my kindness to Mademoiselle Elmire, and he had not wished to let this anniversary go by without bringing to me their thanks and a testimony of their gratitude.

"I gave them supper in the kitchen, and offered them my hospitality for the night. They left the following day.

"The woman returns every year at the same date with the child, a fine little girl, and a new . . . lord and master each time. One man only, a fellow from Auvergne, who thanked me in his strange accent, came back two years in succession. The little girl calls them all 'Papa,' just as one says 'Monsieur' with us."

We were arriving at the house, and we could barely distinguish three shadows standing on the steps, waiting for us. The tallest one took a few steps forward, made a great bow, and said: "Monsieur le Comte, we have come to-day in recognition of our gratefulness. . . ."

He was a Belgian!

After him, the little one spoke in the shrill, singing voice which children use when they recite a compliment.

I appeared to know nothing, and I took Mademoiselle Elmire to one side, and, after a few questions, I asked her: "Is that the father of your child?"

"Oh! no, Monsieur."

"Is the father dead?"

"Oh! no, Monsieur. We still see each other from time to time. He is a gendarme."

"What! then it wasn't the fellow from Marseilles who was there at the birth?"

"Oh! no, Monsieur. That was a rascal who stole all my savings."

"And the gendarme, the real father, does he know his child?"

"Oh! yes, Monsieur, and he loves her very much; but he can't take care of her because he has others by his wife."

OUR LETTERS

NIGHT HOURS IN THE TRAIN INDUCE SLEEP IN SOME AND insomnia in others. With me, any journey prevents my sleeping on the following night.

I had arrived, about five o'clock, at the estate of Abelle, which belongs to my friends, the Murets d'Artus, to spend three weeks there. It is a pretty house, built by one of their grandfathers in the latter half of the last century, and it has remained in the family. Therefore it has that intimate character of dwellings that have always been inhabited, furnished, animated and enlivened by the same people. Nothing changes; none of the soul evaporates from the dwelling, in which the furniture has never been moved, the tapestries never taken down, and have become worn out, faded, discoloured, on the same walls. None of the old furniture leaves the place; only from time to time it is moved a little to make room for a new piece, which enters there like a new-born infant in the midst of brothers and sisters.

The house is on a hill in the centre of a park which slopes down to the river, where there is a little stone bridge. Beyond the water the fields stretch out in the distance, where cows wander slowly, pasturing on the moist grass; their humid eyes seem full of the dew, mist and freshness of the pasture. I love this dwelling, just as one loves a thing which one ardently desires to possess. I return here every autumn with infinite delight; I leave with regret.

After I had dined with this friendly family, by whom I was received like a relative, I asked my chum, Paul Muret: "Which room did you give me this year?"

"Aunt Rose's room."

An hour later, followed by her three children, two tall young girls and a great lump of a boy, Madame Muret d'Artus installed me in Aunt Rose's room, where I had not yet slept.

When I was alone I examined the walls, the furniture, the general aspect of the room, in order to attune my mind to it. I knew it, but not very well, as I had entered it only once or twice, and I looked indifferently at a pastel portrait of Aunt Rose, who gave her name to the room.

This old Aunt Rose, with her hair in curls, looking at me from behind the glass, made very little impression on my mind. She looked to me like a woman of former days, with principles and precepts, as strong on the maxims of morality as on cooking recipes, one of these old aunts who are a wet-blanket on gaiety and the stern and wrinkled angel of provincial families.

I never had heard her spoken of; I knew nothing of her life or of her death. Did she belong to this century or to the preceding one? Had she left this earth after a calm or a stormy existence? Had she given up to heaven the pure soul of an old maid, the calm soul of a spouse, the tender one of a mother, or one moved by love? What difference did it make? The name alone, "Aunt Rose," seemed ridiculous, common, ugly.

I picked up a candle and looked at her severe face, hanging far up in an old gilt frame. Then, as I found it insignificant, disagreeable, even unsympathetic, I began to examine the furniture. It dated from the period of Louis XVI, the Revolution and the Directoire. Not a chair, not a curtain had entered this room since then, and it gave out the subtle odour of memories, which is the combined odour of wood, cloth, chairs, hangings, peculiar to places wherein have lived hearts that have loved and suffered.

I retired but did not sleep. After I had tossed about for an hour or two, I decided to get up and write some letters.

I opened a little mahogany desk with brass trimmings,

which was placed between the two windows, in hope of finding some ink and paper ; but all I found was a quill-pen, very much worn, made of a porcupine's quill, and chewed at the end. I was about to close this piece of furniture, when a shining spot attracted my attention : it looked like the yellow head of a nail, and it formed a little round lump at the corner of a tray. I scratched it with my finger, and it seemed to move. I seized it between two finger-nails, and pulled as hard as I could. It came toward me gently. It was a long gold pin which had been slipped into a hole in the wood and remained hidden there.

Why ? I immediately thought that it must have served to work some spring which hid a secret, and I looked. It took a long time. After at least two hours of investigation, I discovered another hole opposite the first one, but at the bottom of a groove. Into this I stuck my pin : a little shelf sprang up in my face, and I saw two packages of yellow letters, tied with a blue ribbon.

I read them. Here are two of them :

" So you wish me to return to you your letters, my dearest. Here they are, but it pains me to obey. Of what are you afraid ? That I might lose them ? But they are under lock and key. Do you fear that they might be stolen ? I guard against that, for they are my dearest treasure.

" Yes, it pains me deeply. I wondered whether, perhaps, you might not be feeling some regret at the bottom of your heart ? Not regret at having loved me, for I know that you still do, but regret at having expressed on white paper this living love in hours when your heart did not confide in me, but in the pen you held in your hand. When we love, we have need of confession, need of talking or writing, and we either talk or write. Words fly away, those sweet words made of music, air and tenderness, warm and light, which escape as soon as they are uttered, which remain in the memory alone,

but which one can neither see, touch, nor kiss, like the words written by your hand. Your letters? Yes, I am returning them to you! But with what sorrow!

"Undoubtedly, you must have had an afterthought of delicate shame at expressions that are ineffaceable. In your sensitive and timid soul, which can be hurt by an impalpable shade, you must have regretted having written to a man that you loved him. You remember sentences that called up recollections, and you said to yourself: 'I will make ashes of those words.'

"Be satisfied, be calm. Here are your letters. I love you."

"MY FRIEND,—

"No, you have not understood me, you have not guessed. I do not regret, and I never shall, that I told you of my affection. I will always write to you, but you must return my letters to me as soon as you have read them.

"I shall shock you, dear, when I tell you the reason for this demand. It is not poetic, as you imagined, but practical. I am afraid, not of you, but of some mischance. I am guilty. I do not wish my fault to affect others than myself.

"Understand me well. You and I may both die. You might fall off your horse, since you ride every day; you might die from a sudden attack, from a duel, from heart disease, from a carriage accident, in a thousand ways. For, if there is only one death, there are more ways of its reaching us than there are days for us to live.

"Then your sisters, your brother, or your sister-in-law might find my letters! Do you think that they love me? I doubt it. And then, even if they adored me, is it possible for two women and one man to know a secret—such a secret!—and not to tell of it?

"I seem to be saying something very dreadful by speaking first of your death, and then suspecting the discretion of your relatives.

"But don't all of us die sooner or later? And it is almost certain that one of us will precede the other under the ground. We must therefore foresee all dangers, even that one.

"As for me, I will keep your letters beside mine, in the secret of my little desk. I will show them to you there, sleeping side by side in their silken hiding-place, full of our love, like lovers in a tomb.

"You will say to me: 'But if you should die first, my dear, your husband will find these letters.'

"Oh! I fear nothing. First of all, he does not know the secret of my desk, and he will not look for it. And even if he finds it after my death, I fear nothing.

"Did you ever stop to think of all the love-letters that have been found in the drawers of dead women? I have been thinking of this for a long time, and that is the reason I decided to ask you for my letters.

"Think that never, do you understand, never does a woman burn, tear or destroy the letters in which she is told that she is loved. That is our whole life, our whole hope, expectation and dream. These little pieces of paper which bear our name in caressing terms are relics, and we women have chapels, especially chapels in which we are the saints. Our love-letters are our titles to beauty, grace, seduction, the intimate vanity of our womanhood; they are the treasures of our heart. No, a woman never destroys these secret and delicious archives of her life.

But, like everybody else, we die, and then—then these letters are found! Who finds them? The husband. Then what does he do? Nothing. He burns them.

"Oh, I have thought a great deal about that! Just think that every day women are dying who have been loved; every day the traces and proofs of their fault fall into the hands of their husbands, and that there is never a scandal, never a duel.

"Think, my dear, of what a man's heart is. He avenges himself on a living woman; he fights with the man who has

dishonoured her, kills him while she lives, because—well, why? I do not know exactly why. But if, after her death, he finds similar proofs, he burns them and no one is the wiser, and he continues to shake hands with the friend of the dead woman, and feels quite at ease that these letters should not have fallen into strange hands, and that they are destroyed.

“ Oh, how many men I know among my friends who must have burned such proofs, and now pretend to know nothing, and yet they would have fought madly had they found them when she was still alive! But she is dead. Honour has changed. The grave gives absolution for conjugal sins.

“ Therefore, I can safely keep our letters, which, in your hands, would be a menace to both of us. Do you dare to say that I am not right?

“ I love you and kiss you.

“ ROSE.”

I raised my eyes to the portrait of Aunt Rose, and as I looked at her severe, wrinkled face, I thought of all those women's souls which we do not know, and which we suppose to be so different from what they really are, whose inborn and ingenuous craftiness we never can penetrate, their quiet duplicity; and a verse of Vigny returned to my memory:

“ *Toujours ce compagnon dont le cœur n'est pas sûr* ”

NIGHT

A NIGHTMARE

I LOVE NIGHT PASSIONATELY. I LOVE IT AS ONE LOVES ONE'S country or one's mistress. I love it with all my senses, with my eyes which see it, with my sense of smell which inhales it, with my ears which listen to its silence, with my whole body which is caressed by its shadows. The larks sing in the sunlight, in the blue heavens, in the warm air, in the light air of clear mornings. The owl flies at night, a sombre patch passing through black space, and, rejoicing in the black immensity that intoxicates him, he utters a vibrant and sinister cry.

In the day-time I am tired and bored. The day is brutal and noisy. I rarely get up, I dress myself languidly and I go out regretfully. Every movement, every gesture, every word, every thought, tires me as though I were raising a crushing load.

But when the sun goes down a confused joy invades my whole being. I awaken and become animated. As the shadows lengthen I feel quite different, younger, stronger, more lively, happier. I watch the great soft shadows falling from the sky and growing deeper. They envelop the city like an impenetrable and impalpable wave; they hide, efface and destroy colours and forms; they embrace houses, people and buildings in their imperceptible grasp. Then I would like to cry out with joy like the screech-owls, to run upon the roofs like the cats, and an impetuous, invincible desire to love burns in my veins. I go, I walk, sometimes in the darkened outskirts of Paris, sometimes in the neighbouring woods, where I hear my sisters, the beasts, and my brothers, the poachers, prowling.

One is killed at last by what one loves violently. But how shall I explain what happens to me? How can I ever make people understand that I am able to tell it? I do not know, I cannot tell. I only know that this is—that is all.

Well, yesterday—was it yesterday?—Yes, no doubt, unless it was earlier, a day, a month, a year earlier . . . I do not know, but it must have been yesterday, because since then no day has risen, no sun has dawned. But how long has it been night? How long? Who can tell? Who will ever know?

Yesterday, then, I went out after dinner, as I do every evening. It was very fine, very mild, very warm. As I went down towards the boulevards I looked above my head at the black streams full of stars, outlined in the sky between the roofs of the houses, which were turning round and causing this rolling stream of stars to undulate like a real river.

Everything was distinct in the clear air, from the planets to the gas-light. So many lights were burning above, in the city, that the shadows seemed luminous. Bright nights are more joyful than days of bright sunshine. The cafés on the boulevard were flaring; people were laughing, passing up and down, drinking. I went into a theatre for a few moments. Into what theatre, I cannot tell. There was so much light in there that I was depressed, and I came out again with my heart saddened by the clash of brutal light on the gold of the balcony, by the factitious glitter of the great crystal chandelier, by the glaring footlights, by the melancholy of this artificial and crude light. I arrived at the Champs-Élysées, where the open-air concerts look like conflagrations in the branches. The chestnut-trees, touched with yellow light, look as if they were painted, like phosphorescent trees. The electric bulbs, like pale dazzling moons, like eggs from the moon, fallen from heaven, like monstrous, living pearls, caused the streaks of gas-light, filthy, ugly gas-light and the garland of coloured, lighted glasses to grow pale beneath their pearly, mysterious and regal light.

I stopped beneath the Arc de Triomphe to look at the Avenue, the long and wonderful, starry Avenue, leading to Paris between two rows of fire and the stars! The stars above, the unknown stars, thrown haphazard through infinity, where they form those strange shapes which make us dream and think so much.

I entered the Bois de Boulogne, where I remained for a long, long time. I was seized by a strange thrill, a powerful and unforeseen emotion, an exaltation of mind which bordered on frenzy. I walked on and on, and then I returned. What time was it when I passed again beneath the Arc de Triomphe? I do not know. The city was sleeping, and clouds, great black clouds, were slowly spreading over the sky.

For the first time I felt that something strange was going to happen, something new.

It seemed to be getting cold, that the air was becoming thicker, that night, my beloved night, was weighing heavily upon my heart. The Avenue was deserted now. Two solitary policemen were walking near the cab-stand, and a string of vegetable carts was going to the Halles along the roadway, scarcely lit by the gas-jets, which seemed to be dying out. They moved along slowly, laden with carrots, turnips and cabbages. The invisible drivers were asleep, the horses were walking with an even step, following the carts in front of them, and making no noise on the wooden pavement. As they passed each lamp on the footpath, the carrots showed up red in the light, the turnips white, the cabbages green, and they passed one after another, these carts which were as red as fire, as white as silver, and as green as emeralds. I followed them, then I turned into the Rue Royale and returned to the boulevards. There was nobody to be seen, none of the cafés were open; only a few belated pedestrians hurried by. I had never seen Paris so dead and so deserted. I looked at my watch. It was two o'clock.

Some force was driving me, the desire to walk. So I went

as far as the Bastille. There I became aware that I had never seen so dark a night, for I could not even see the Colonne de Juillet, whose Genius in gold was lost in the impenetrable obscurity. A curtain of clouds as dense as the ether had buried the stars and seemed to be descending upon the world to blot it out.

I retraced my steps. There was nobody about me. However, at the Place du Château d'Eau, a drunken man almost bumped into me, than disappeared. For some time I could hear his sonorous and uneven steps. I went on. At the top of the Faubourg Montmartre a cab passed, going in the direction of the Seine. I hailed it but the driver did not reply. Near the Rue Drouot a woman was loitering: "Listen, dearie,"—I hastened my steps to avoid her outstretched hand. Then there was nothing more. In front of the Vaudeville Theatre a rag-picker was searching in the gutter. His little lantern was moving just above the ground. I said to him: "What time is it, my good man?"

"How do I know?" he grumbled. "I have no watch."

Then I suddenly perceived that the lamps had all been extinguished. I know that at this time of year they are put out early, before dawn, for the sake of economy. But daylight was still far off, very far off indeed!

"Let us go to the Halles," I said to myself; "there at least I shall find life."

I set off, but it was too dark even to see the way. I advanced slowly, as one does in a forest, recognising the streets by counting them. In front of the Crédit Lyonnais a dog growled. I turned up the Rue de Grammont and lost my way. I wandered about, and then I recognised the Bourse by the iron railings around it. The whole of Paris was sleeping, a deep, terrifying sleep. In the distance a cab rumbled, one solitary cab, perhaps it was the one which had passed me a while back. I tried to reach it, going in the direction of the noise, through streets that were lonely and dark, dark and sombre as death.

Again I lost my way. Where was I? What nonsense to put out the lights so soon! Not one person passing by. Not one late reveller, not one thief, not even the mewing of an amorous cat? Nothing.

"Where on earth were the police?" I said to myself: "I will shout and they will come." I shouted. There was no answer. I called more loudly. My voice vanished without an echo, weak, muffled, stifled by the night, the impenetrable night. I yelled: "Help! Help! Help!" My desperate cry remained unanswered. What time was it? I pulled out my watch, but I had no matches. I listened to the gentle tick-tick of the little mechanism with a strange and unfamiliar pleasure. It seemed to be a living thing. I felt less lonely. What a mystery! I resumed my walk like a blind man, feeling my way along the wall with my stick, and every moment I raised my eyes to the heavens, hoping that day would dawn at last. But the sky was dark, all dark, more profoundly dark than the city.

What could the time be? It seemed to me I had been walking an infinite length of time, for my legs were giving way beneath me, my breast was heaving and I was suffering horribly from hunger. I decided to ring at the first street door. I pulled the copper bell and it rang sonorously through the house. It sounded strangely, as if that vibrating noise were alone in the house. I waited. There was no answer. The door did not open. I rang again. I waited again—nothing! I got frightened! I ran to the next house, and, twenty times in succession, I rang the bells in the dark corridors where the concierge was supposed to sleep, but he did not awake. I went on further, pulling the bells and the knockers with all my strength, kicking and knocking with my hand and stick on the doors, which remained obstinately closed.

Suddenly I perceived that I had reached the Halles. The market was deserted, not a sound, not a movement, not a cart, not a man, not a bundle of flowers or vegetables—it was empty,

motionless, abandoned, dead. I was seized with a horrible terror. What was happening? Oh, my God, what was happening?

I set off again. But the time? The time? Who would tell me the time? Not a clock struck in the churches or the public buildings. I thought: "I will open the glass of my watch and feel the hands with my fingers." I pulled out my watch. . . . It was not going. . . . It had stopped. Nothing more, nothing more, not a ripple in the city, not a light, not the slightest suspicion of a sound in the air. Nothing! Nothing more! not even the distant rumbling of a cab! Nothing more. I had reached the quays, and a cold chill rose from the river. Was the Seine still flowing? I wanted to know, I found the steps and went down. I could not hear the current rushing under the bridge. . . . A few more steps. . . . Then sand. . . . Mud . . . then water. I dipped my hand into it. It was flowing . . . flowing . . . cold . . . cold . . . cold . . . almost frozen . . . almost dried up . . . almost dead.

I fully realised that I should never have the strength to come up, and that I was going to die there . . . in my turn, of hunger, fatigue and cold.

TRAVELLING

" Saint-Agnès, 6th May.

" MY DEAR FRIEND,—

" You asked me to write to you often, and particularly to tell you what I had seen. You also asked me to search through my memories of travel and find some of those short anecdotes which one hears from a peasant met by the way, from some hotel-keeper, or some passing stranger, and which remain in the memory like the key to a country. You believe that a landscape sketched in a few lines, or a short story told in a few words, reveals the true character of a country, makes it live, visibly and dramatically. I shall try to do as you wish. From time to time I will send you letters, in which I shall not mention ourselves, but only the horizon and the people who move on it. Now I begin.

" Spring, it seems to me, is a season when one should eat and drink landscapes. It is the season for sensations, as the autumn is the season for thought. In spring the country stirs the body; in autumn it penetrates the mind.

" This year I wanted to inhale orange-blossoms, and I set out for the South at the time when everybody comes back from there. I passed through Monaco, the town of pilgrims, the rival of Mecca and Jerusalem, without leaving my money in anybody else's pocket, and I ascended the high hills beneath a canopy of lemon, orange and olive-trees.

" Did you ever sleep in a field of orange-trees in bloom? The air which one inhales deliciously is a quintessence of perfumes. This powerful and sweet smell, as savoury as a sweet-meat, seems to penetrate one, to impregnate, to intoxicate, to

induce languor, to bring about a dreamy and somnolent torpor. It is like opium prepared by fairy hands and not by chemists.

"This is a country of gorges. The sides of the mountains are seamed and slashed all over, and in these winding crevices grow veritable forests of lemon-trees. At intervals, where the abrupt ravine stops at a sort of ledge, man has fashioned reservoirs which catch the water from the rain storms. They are great holes with smooth walls, which offer no projection to catch the hand of those who fall.

"I was walking slowly through one of these rising valleys, looking through the leaves at the bright fruit still remaining on the branches. The narrow gorge made the heavy perfumes of the flowers more penetrating; in there the air seemed dense because of them. I felt tired and wanted to sit down. A few drops of water rolled on the grass, I thought a spring must be near, and I climbed higher to find it. But I reached the edge of one of these huge, deep reservoirs. I sat down cross-legged and remained dreaming in front of the hole, which seemed to be full of ink, so black and stagnant was the water in it. Down below, through the branches, I could see, like splashes, bits of the Mediterranean, blindingly dazzling. But my glance constantly returned to this vast sombre hole which seemed uninhabited by any form of water life, its surface was so still.

"Suddenly a voice made me start. An old gentleman, looking for flowers (for this country is the richest in Europe for botanists), asked me :

" ' Are you a relative of those poor children ? ' "

" I looked at him in astonishment.

" ' What children ? ' "

" Then he seemed embarrassed and answered with a bow :

" ' I beg your pardon. Seeing you so absorbed in that reservoir I imagined you were thinking of the awful drama which took place there.' "

" I wanted to know all about it, and I asked him to tell me the story.

"It is a very gloomy and heart-breaking story, my friend, and very commonplace, at the same time. It is simply like an incident from the daily papers. I do not know whether my emotion is to be attributed to the dramatic way in which it was told to me, to the mountain background, or to the contrast between the joyous flowers and sunshine and this dark, murderous hole. My heart was torn and my nerves shaken by this story, which may not seem so terribly poignant to you, perhaps, as you read it in your room, without seeing the scene in which the drama is laid.

"It was in the spring a few years back. Two little boys often used to play on the edge of this cistern, while their tutor read a book, lying under a tree. Now, one hot afternoon, a piercing cry aroused the man, who was dozing, and the noise of water splashing after a fall caused him to get up immediately. The younger of the two children, aged eleven years, was yelling, standing near the reservoir, whose troubled, rippling surface had closed over the elder, who had just fallen in while running along the stone ledge.

"The distracted tutor, without waiting, without thinking, jumped into the depths, and did not appear again, having struck his head against the bottom. At the same moment, the little boy, who had come to the surface, was waving his arms to his brother. Then the child who was on dry land lay down and stretched out, while the other tried to swim, to reach the wall, and soon four little hands seized and held each other, clutching in a convulsive grip. Both felt the keen joy of being restored to life, the thrill of a peril that has passed. The elder tried to climb up, but could not, the wall being steep, and the younger, being too weak, was slowly slipping towards the hole. Then they remained motionless, seized again with terror, and waited.

"The smaller boy grasped the hand of the older with all his might, and wept nervously, saying: 'I can't pull you up.

I can't pull you up.' Then, suddenly he began to shout : ' Help ! Help ! ' But his piping voice hardly pierced the dome of foliage above their heads. They remained there for a long time, for hours and hours, face to face, these two children, with the same thought, the same fear, the awful dread lest one of them, becoming exhausted, should loosen his weakened grip. And they kept on calling in vain. At length the elder, who was shaking with cold, said to the younger : ' I can't go on. I am going to fall. Good-bye, little brother.' And the other repeated with heaving breath : ' Not yet, not yet ; wait ! ' Evening came on, quiet evening, its stars reflected in the water. The elder boy, who was fainting, said : ' Let go one hand, I want to give you my watch.' He had received it as a present a few days before, and since then it had been the chief care of his heart. He succeeded in getting it, handed it up, and the younger, who was sobbing, placed it on the grass beside him.

" It was now completely dark. The two unfortunate creatures were overcome and could scarcely hold out much longer. The bigger boy, feeling that his hour had come, murmured again : ' Good-bye, little brother. Kiss papa and mamma.' His paralysed fingers relaxed. He sank and did not come up again. . . .

The younger, who was left alone, began to cry madly : ' Paul ! Paul ! ' but his brother never returned. Then he dashed away, falling over stones, shaken by the most terrible anguish that can wring the heart of a child, and arrived in the drawing-room where his parents were waiting. He lost his way again when taking them to the reservoir. He could not find the way. Finally he recognised the place. ' It is there ; yes, it is there.' The cistern had to be emptied, and the owner would not allow this, as he needed the water for his lemon-trees. In the end the two bodies were recovered, but not until the next day.

" You see, my dear, that this is just a common newspaper story. But if you had seen the hole, you would have been

moved to the bottom of your heart at the thought of this child's agony, hanging on to his brother's arm, of this interminable struggle on the part of two children accustomed only to laugh and play, and by that simple little detail: the giving over of the watch. I said to myself: 'Fate preserve me from ever receiving such a relic!' I do not know of anything more terrible than the memory that clings to a familiar object that one cannot get rid of. Think that every time he touches this sacred watch, the survivor will see the horrible scene again, the cistern, the wall, the calm water, and the distorted face of his brother, still alive but as surely lost as though he were already dead. During his whole life, at every moment that vision will be there, evoked the moment the tip of his finger touches his watch-pocket.

"I felt sad until evening. I went off, still going higher, leaving the region of orange-trees for the regions of olive-trees only, and the latter for the pine-tree region. Then I entered a valley of stones, reaching the ruins of an old castle, built, they say, in the tenth century, by a Saracen chief, a wise man, who got baptized for love of a girl.

"Mountains everywhere around me, and in front of me the sea, the sea on which there is a scarcely visible patch: Corsica, or rather the shadow of Corsica.

"But on the mountain-tops reddened by the setting sun, in the vast heavens, and on the sea, on the whole superb horizon I had come to admire, I saw only two poor children, one lying along the edge of a hole filled with black water, the other sunk up to his neck, held together by their hands, weeping face to face, distracted. And all the time I seemed to hear a feeble voice saying: 'Good-bye, little brother. I give you my watch.'

"This letter will seem very lugubrious to you, my dear friend. Another time I shall try to be more cheerful."

MADAME HUSSON'S MAY KING

WE HAD JUST PASSED THROUGH GISORS, WHERE I HAD been awakened by the porters shouting the name of the place, and I was falling off to sleep again, when a frightful jerk threw me on top of the fat lady in the opposite seat.

A wheel had come off the engine, which was lying across the line. The tender and the luggage-van, also derailed, lay beside this wreck, which panted, shuddered, whistled, snorted and spat like a horse fallen in the street ; which lies with throbbing flank, quivering chest, smoking nostril, shuddering through its whole body, but apparently unable to make the slightest effort to get up and go on again.

No one was killed or injured, only a few bruised, for the train had not yet regained its full speed. We gazed sadly at the great crippled iron body that could no longer carry us and would bar our way, perhaps for some time, for they would certainly have to send to Paris for a relief-train.

It was now ten o'clock in the morning, and I decided at once to get back to Gisors and have some lunch.

As I was walking down the line I kept saying to myself :

"Gisors, Gisors, I am sure I know someone there. But who ? Gisors ? I am certain I have a friend in the town."

Suddenly a name leapt into my mind : "Albert Marambot." He was an old college friend whom I had not seen for twelve years at least, who was now practising as a doctor at Gisors. He had often sent me invitations, which I always accepted but never kept. This time, however, I would use my opportunity.

I asked the first person I met :

"Do you know where Dr. Marambot lives?"

He answered immediately, in the drawling Normandy accent:

"In the Rue Dauphine."

I saw, indeed, on the door of the house he pointed out, a big brass plate on which was engraved the name of my old friend. I rang the bell, but the maid, a yellow-haired, slow-moving girl, repeated stupidly:

"He's out, he's out."

I could hear the clatter of forks and glasses, so I cried out:

"Hello, Marambot!"

A door opened and a fat man with side-whiskers came out with a vexed air, carrying a napkin in his hand.

I really should not have recognised him. He looked at least forty-five, and I had an instant vision of the provincial life that makes a man heavy, middle-aged and old. In a flash of thought that took less time than the action of holding out my hand, I knew his life, his manner of living, his attitude of mind and his theories about things. I guessed at the large meals to which he owed his paunch, the drowsiness after dinner in the lethargy of an overlaid digestion watered with cognac, the cursory examination he gave his sick when his thoughts were on the fowl roasting on the spit. His conversations on cooking, on cider, brandy and wine; on the manner of cooking certain dishes, and how best to thicken certain sauces, needed no further evidence than the moist redness of his cheeks, his drooping eyelids and the dull shine of his eyes.

I said to him:

"You don't recognise me. I am Raoul Aubertin."

He opened his arms and nearly suffocated me. His first words were these:

"You haven't had lunch, of course?"

"No."

"What luck! I was just sitting down to it and there is an excellent trout."

Five minutes later I was sitting opposite him at lunch.

I asked him:

"You are still a bachelor?"

"Why, yes."

"And are you happy here?"

"I am not bored; I keep busy. I have patients and friends. I eat well, enjoy good health—can laugh and hunt. That's good enough for me."

"You don't find life monotonous in this little town?"

"No, old chap—not if you know your way about. A small place is in essentials very like a large one. Events and pleasures are less varied, but one notices them more; there are fewer people, but one sees more of them. If you know all the windows in a street, each one of them interests and intrigues you more than a whole street in Paris.

"A little town is very amusing, you know—very amusing, most amusing. Take this one—Gisors. I have at my finger-tips all there is to know about it, from its beginning to the present day. You have no idea what a quaint history it has."

"You are a native of Gisors?"

"Me? No, I belong to Gournay—its neighbour and rival. Gournay is to Gisors what Lucullus was to Cicero. Here every one is out for Fame; people call us the 'arrogant people of Gisors.' At Gournay they think of nothing but their stomachs. We call them the 'guzzlers of Gournay.' Gisors despises Gournay, but Gournay laughs at Gisors. This is a comic country."

I noticed that I was eating a truly exquisite dish of soft-boiled eggs surrounded by a layer of meat jelly, savoured with herbs and slightly frozen.

Smacking my lips to please him, I said to Marambot:

"This is good."

He smiled.

"It only requires two things—a good jelly, which is hard to get, and good eggs. Oh, good eggs—how rare they are, with a slightly reddish yolk, and really savoury! I keep two hen-runs, one for eggs, the other for fat fowls. I feed my laying hens in a special way. I have my own ideas on the subject. In an egg, as in the flesh of a chicken, or in beef, or mutton, or milk, or any of these things, you get, and you ought to be able to taste, the juice, the quintessence of what the animal has been eating. How much better we should fare if we paid more attention to that!"

I laughed.

"So you are a gourmand?"

"Lord! It's only idiots who are not! One is a gourmand much as one is an artist, or a scholar, or a poet. The palate, my dear, is a delicate organ as perfectible and as worthy of respect as the eye or ear. Not to have a palate is to be deprived of an exquisite faculty, the power of appreciating the quality of food, just as one can be deprived of the power to appreciate the quality of a book or a work of art. It is to be deprived of one of the primary senses—a part of man's superiority; without it, one is relegated to the innumerable ranks of weaklings, outcasts and fools of which our race is composed. In other words, it means your tongue is stupid, as many brains are stupid.

"The man who cannot distinguish between a crayfish and a lobster, or a herring (an excellent fish which has in itself all the flavour and scent of the sea) and a mackerel or a whiting, between a *poire crassane* and a *poire duchesse*, is comparable to one who confuses Balzac and Eugène Sue, or a Beethoven symphony with a bandmaster's march, or the Belvedere Apollo with the statue of General Blanmont."

"Who in the world is General Blanmont?"

"Oh—of course, you don't know. It's easy to see you don't belong to Gisors! My dear old chap, I told you just now that the inhabitants of this town were nicknamed the 'arrogant men of Gisors,' and never was an epithet better applied. But let's get on with lunch first, and I will tell you about the town while I show you round."

He stopped talking now and then to sip a glass of wine, which he looked at tenderly every time he put it down.

He was an amusing sight with his napkin tucked into his collar, his flushed cheeks and shining eyes, and whiskers spreading round his busy jaws.

He made me eat to repletion. Then, when I was thinking of getting back to the station, he seized my arm and led me into the street.

The town, which was pleasant enough in its provincial way, was crowned by its fortress, the most curious monument of the military architecture of the twelfth century left in France; the fortress itself looked down over a long green valley where the heavy Norman cows browsed and ruminated in the pastures.

The doctor said to me:

"Gisors, a town of four thousand inhabitants on the borders of the Eure, was first mentioned in the *Commentaries* of Julius Cæsar: *Cæsar's ostium*, then *Cæsartium*, *Cæsortium*, *Gisortium*, *Gisors*. I'll now take you to see the place where the Roman army encamped. Their traces are still visible."

I laughed and replied:

"It seems to me, old man, that you are suffering from a disease which you as a doctor ought to investigate. It is called *parochial pride*."

He stopped short.

"Parochial pride, my friend, is only natural patriotism. I love my house and, by a natural extension of that love, my town and my province, because I still find in them the

customs of my village; but, if I love my frontier, if I defend it, if I am angry when a neighbour sets foot on it, it is because I feel my house already threatened, because the frontier which I do not know is the road to my province. I myself am a Norman, a true Norman. Well, in spite of my bitterness against Germany and my desire for vengeance, I do not dislike her, I do not hate her by instinct as I hate the English, the real, hereditary and natural enemy of the Normans, because the English have invaded this home of my ancestors, have plundered and ravaged it twenty times, and the traditional hatred of this faithless race came to me with life itself, from my father—— But here is the statue of the general."

"What general?"

"General Blanmont! We had to have a statue. They don't call us the arrogant men of Gisors for nothing. So we discovered General Blanmont. Look in the window of this bookshop."

He dragged me in front of a bookshop, in which about fifteen books bound in yellow, red and blue caught my eye.

When I read the titles I began to giggle idiotically. They were *Gisors: Its Beginnings, Its Future*, by M. X., a member of several learned societies.

History of Gisors, by the Abbé A——

Gisors from the Time of Cæsar to Our Day, by M. B., a landed proprietor.

Gisors and Its Neighbourhood, by Dr. C. D.

The Glories of Gisors, by an antiquarian.

"My dear man," replied Marambot, "not a year passes, not one, mark you, but a new history of Gisors is brought out; we have twenty-three of them already!"

"What about the glories of Gisors?" I asked.

"Oh, I couldn't tell you all of them, I can only speak of the outstanding ones. First we had General Blanmont, then

the Baron Davillier, the celebrated ceramist who explored Spain and the Balearic Islands and revealed to collectors the wonderful Moorish pottery. In literature, we have a journalist of considerable merit, now dead, Charles Brainne, and, among well-known living men, the very eminent director of the *Nouvelliste de Rouen*, Charles Lapierre . . . oh, and many more—a great many more.”

We were going down the gentle slope of a long street, warmed from end to end by the June sun, which had driven the inhabitants indoors.

Suddenly a man came into sight at the other end of the road—a drunken man, reeling as he came. Head thrust forward, with arms swinging and nerveless legs, he came on in jerks of three, six or ten quick steps, always followed by a pause. When a short, strenuous rush had landed him in the middle of the street, he stopped short and swayed as though hesitating between a fall and a further display of energy. Then he advanced abruptly in another direction. Next he cannoned violently into a house, to which he attached himself with every appearance of wanting to enter it through the wall. Then he turned round with a sharp effort and stared ahead, his mouth open and his eyes blinking in the sun. At last, with a jerk of his hind quarters, he removed his back from the wall and set off again.

A little yellow dog, a famished mongrel, followed him, barking, stopping when he stopped and going on again when he went on.

“Look,” said Marambot, “there is Madame Husson’s May King.”

I was most astonished and asked :

“Madame Husson’s May King—whatever do you mean by that ?”

The Doctor began to laugh.

“Oh, it’s just a way we have here in speaking of drunken

men. It arose from an old story which has now become a legend, although true in all respects."

"Is it an amusing story?"

"Oh, most amusing."

"Go ahead then."

"Right you are. At one time there lived in this town an old lady who, being very virtuous herself, encouraged virtue in others. Her name was Madame Husson. I'm telling you the story with the real names, you know, not with made-up ones. Madame Husson spent most of her time in good works, helping the poor and rewarding the deserving. Tiny, mincing, her head surmounted by a black silk peruke, formal and polite, on the best of terms with God, as represented by the Abbé Malou, she had the greatest horror, an instinctive horror, of vice, and most of all for that vice which the Church calls incontinence. Premarital getting of children drove her beside herself with rage, and exasperated her until she was almost out of her wits.

"Now it was the period when May Queens were being crowned all round Paris, and Madame Husson was taken with the idea of having a May Queen at Gisors.

"She laid her project before the Abbé Malou, and he at once drew up a list of candidates.

"But Madame Husson had a certain maidservant, an old maidservant named Françoise, as uncompromising as her mistress.

"As soon as the priest had gone, the mistress called her servant and said to her:

"'Listen, Françoise, here are the girls whom his Reverence suggests to me for the prize of virtue: try and find out what people about here think of them.'

"And Françoise went forth to spy out the land. She raked together all the gossip, all the tales, all the scandal,

every vaguest hint. For fear that she should forget anything, she wrote it all down in her household accounts along with the items of expenditure, and handed it every morning to Madame Husson, who used to read, after she had adjusted her spectacles on her thin nose :

" " Bread	.	.	.	.	.	.	2d.
Milk	.	.	.	.	.	.	1d.
Butter	.	.	.	.	.	.	4d.

Malonia Levesque disgraced herself last year with Mathurin Poilu.

One Leg of Mutton	.	.	.	.	.	1s.
Salt	.	.	.	.	.	$\frac{1}{2}$ d.

Rosalie Vatinel was met in the wood at Riboudet with Césarie Piénoir by Madame Onésime, the washer Woman, on the 20th of July at dusk.

Radishes	.	.	.	.	.	$\frac{1}{2}$ d.
Vinegar	.	.	.	.	.	1d.
Sorrel Salt	.	.	.	.	.	1d.

Josephine Durdent, that nobody thinks has gone Rong but she gets letters from young Oportun who works in Rouen who sent her a Bonet as a gift by the stage-coach.'

"Not a single girl emerged unscathed from this searching investigation. Françoise questioned every one, neighbours, tradesmen, the schoolmaster, the nuns at the school, and gathered up the faintest rumours.

"Since there is not a girl in the universe upon whom the gossips have not looked askance, there was not found in the country-side a maiden safe from some scrap of scandal.

"Now Madame Husson desired that the May Queen,

like Cæsar's wife, should be quite above suspicion, and in the face of her servant's housekeeping book she was reduced to grief and despair.

"The circle of choice was widened to include the neighbouring villages, but they found nothing.

"The Mayor was consulted. His candidates broke down. Those of Dr. Barbesol were no more successful, although he gave the most exact scientific guarantees.

"Then, one morning, Françoise, who had just returned from one of her expeditions, said to her mistress :

"Look here, Madame, if you want to crown anyone, there is no one but Isidore in the whole district."

"Madame Husson became deeply thoughtful.

"She knew him well, this Isidore, son of Virginie the greengrocer. His proverbial chastity had provided food for mirth in Gisors for many a long day, and served as an engaging subject of conversation for the town and of amusement for the girls, who delighted in teasing him. A little over twenty years of age, big, ungainly, slow and timorous, he helped his mother with her business, and passed his days, seated on a chair before the door, sorting fruit and vegetables.

"He had an unhealthy fear of petticoats, which made him lower his eyes the moment one of the women coming into the shop looked at him with a smile, and this well-known timidity of his made him the laughing-stock of all the wags in the district.

"Risky words, lewd sayings, and obscene allusions made him blush so promptly that Dr. Barbesol had nicknamed him the thermometer of modesty. Did he or did he not know? his neighbours asked themselves maliciously. Was it simply the presentiment of unknown and shameful mysteries, or was it rather indignation at the loathly contacts entailed in love that seemed to move the son of the green-

grocer Virginie so strongly? The message-boys of the district, when running past his shop, shouted out filthy sayings at the top of their voices, in order to see him lower his eyes; the girls passed and repassed before him, whispering sly suggestions that drove him back into the house. The more impudent provoked him openly, in order to laugh at him and amuse themselves, made assignations, suggested a thousand abominable ideas.

"So Madame Husson had become deeply thoughtful.

"In truth, Isidore was an example of quite exceptional virtue, notorious, impregnable. No one, not even the most sceptical or the most unbelieving, could have or would have dared to suspect Isidore of infringing in the smallest degree any law of morality whatever. Never once had he been seen in a café, never once met in the streets of an evening. He went to bed at eight and got up at four. He was a paragon, a pearl.

"All the same, Madame Husson still hesitated. The idea of substituting a May King for a May Queen troubled her, upset her a little, and she resolved to consult the Abbé Malou.

"The Abbé Malou replied:

" 'What do you desire to reward, Madame? Virtue, I take it, and nothing but virtue.

" 'What does it matter to you, therefore, whether virtue be in a male or a female? Virtue is eternal, of no country and of no sex: it is just *virtue*.'

"Thus encouraged, Madame Husson went to find the Mayor.

"He quite approved.

" 'We will hold a splendid festival,' said he, 'and another year, if we find a woman as worthy as Isidore, we will crown a woman. We shall indeed set a lofty example to Nanterre. Let us not be exclusive, let us welcome all that is worthy.'

"Isidore, told of the honour, blushed deeply and seemed content.

"The day of the ceremony was fixed for the fifteenth of August, the Festival of the Virgin Mary and of the Emperor Napoleon.

"The municipality had decided to lend an air of exceptional splendour to this solemn ceremonial, and had placed the platform on the Couronneaux, a charming continuation of the ramparts of the old fortress, to which I will shortly take you.

"By a natural reversal of public opinion, Isidore's virtue, till then a matter for ridicule, became suddenly a matter for envy, since it was going to bring him five hundred francs, also a post office savings-book, with unlimited esteem and glory to spare. The girls now regretted their frivolity, their smirks, their immodest behaviour; and Isidore, quite as modest and timorous as ever, had taken on a faint complacent air that spoke his inward satisfaction.

"With the arrival of the fifteenth of August, the whole of the Rue Dauphine was draped with flags. Ah, I've forgotten to tell you after what event this roadway had been called Rue Dauphine.

"It would appear that the Dauphine, I don't know now which one, when visiting Gisors, had been kept on exhibition so long by the authorities that, in the middle of a triumphal procession through the town, she stopped the procession before one of the houses in this street and exclaimed:

"'Oh, what a beautiful house, how I would like to visit it! Whose is it?'

"They told her the owner's name; he was sought out, found and brought, embarrassed but covered with glory, before the princess.

"She stepped down from her carriage, entered the house, pretended to look over it from top to bottom, and even

remained shut up for some moments alone in one of the rooms.

"When she came out again, the people, flattered by the honour shown to a citizen of Gisors, shouted out :

" ' Long live the Dauphine.' "

"But a little song was made up by some wag, and the street took the name of her Royal Highness, because :

The Princess was in a hurry,
And all ceremony waiving,
She baptized it with a trickle
Of her own Princessly saving.

"But let me return to Isidore.

"Flowers had been strewn all along the route of the procession, just as is customary at the procession of the Holy Sacrament, and the National Guard was called out, under the orders of its Chief, Commandant Desbarres, a stout old warrior of the Grande Armée, who proudly displayed, beside a frame holding the Cross of Honour bestowed by the Emperor himself, a Cossack's beard, cut at a single sabre-stroke from its owner's chin by the Commandant, during the retreat from Russia.

"The corps that he commanded was a picked body famous throughout the province, and his company of Gisors Grenadiers was in demand at all the important festivals within a radius of fifteen or twenty leagues. The story is told that King Louis Philippe, when reviewing the troops from Eure, stopped in wonder before the Gisors Company and cried out :

" ' Oh, who are these fine grenadiers ? ' "

" ' Gisors men,' replied the General.

" ' I might have known it,' murmured the King.

"The Commandant Desbarres set out with his men, headed by the band, to fetch Isidore from his mother's shop.

"After a brief tune had been played beneath his windows, the May King himself appeared upon the threshold.

"He was clad from head to foot in white duck, and wore a straw hat, which bore, like a cockade, a small bunch of orange-blossom.

"This question of dress had given Madame Husson much anxiety. She hesitated for a long time between the black garment worn by those taking their first Communion and the full vesture of white. But Francoise, her adviser, decided her in favour of the full white, pointing out that the May King would look like a swan.

"Behind him appeared his protectress, his godmother, the triumphant Madame Husson. She took his arm, ready for the start, and the Mayor took up his position on the other side of the May King. The drums began to beat. Commandant Desbarres gave the command :

" ' Present arms ! ' "

"The procession set off on its march towards the church, in the midst of a great crowd of people assembled from all the neighbouring villages. After a short Mass and a touching address from the Abbé Malou, the procession headed for the Couronneaux, where the feast was set out in readiness under a tent.

"Before sitting down at table, the Mayor made a speech. Here are his exact words. I learnt them off by heart, for it was a fine speech :

" ' Young man, a lady of wealth, beloved by the poor and respected by the rich, Madame Husson, to whom I here render thanks on behalf of the whole country, conceived the idea, the happy and kindly idea, of establishing in the town a prize for virtue which should be a worthy inducement to the inhabitants of this beautiful country-side.

" ' You, young man, are the first to be chosen, the first to be crowned in this royal line of wisdom and chastity.

Your name will always stand at the head of this roll of the most worthy ; and it is demanded of you that your life—make no mistake about it—that your whole life should be in harmony with this happy beginning. To-day, in the presence of this noble woman who rewards your conduct, in the presence of these citizen-soldiers who have taken up their arms in your honour, in the presence of this deeply-moved throng, gathered together to acclaim you, or rather to acclaim Virtue in your person, you are entering into a solemn covenant with the town, with us all, to preserve until the day of your death the magnificent promise of your youth.

“ ‘ Always bear this in mind, young man. You are the first seed sown in the field of hope, and we look to you to bring forth those fruits expected of you.’ ”

“ The Mayor took three steps, opened his arms and clasped the sobbing Isidore to his heart.

“ He sobbed, the May King, without knowing why, with mixed emotion, with pride, with vague and pleasant sentiment.

“ Then the Mayor placed in one of his hands the silk purse in which the gold chinked, five hundred francs in gold ! . . . and in the other a little savings-book. And in a solemn voice he pronounced :

“ ‘ Honour, glory and riches to virtue.’ ”

“ Commandant Desbarres cried out:

“ ‘ Bravo.’ ”

“ The grenadiers cheered ; the people applauded.

“ Madame Husson too dried her eyes.

“ Then they sat down at their places around the table where the banquet was spread.

“ It was never-ending and sumptuous. Course followed course ; yellow cider and red wine fraternised in glasses, side by side, and mingled in the stomach. The rattle of plates, the

voices and the muffled tones of the music made a deep, ceaseless murmur, which died away in the clear sky where the swallows flew. Every now and then Madame Husson adjusted her wig of black silk, which had slipped over one ear, and talked with the Abbé Malou. The Mayor, in high spirits, talked politics with Commandant Desbarres, and Isidore ate, Isidore drank, as he had never eaten and drunk before! He helped himself again and again to everything, finding out for the first time that it is sweet to feel one's belly full of good things that please the palate before they please the stomach. He had adroitly loosened the buckle of his trousers, which tightened with the increasing pressure of his abdomen, and in silence, a little disturbed, however, by a stain of wine fallen on his cotton vest, he ceased to chew in order to lift the glass to his mouth and keep it there as long as possible, while he took slow sips of wine.

"The time for toasts came round. They were many and much applauded. The evening came: they had been at table since midday. Now there floated in the valley a thin, milky mist, the light vesture of night upon the streams and meadows: the sun dipped below the horizon: the cows lowed afar off in the mists of the pasture land. It was over: they returned towards Gisors. The procession, broken up now, marched helter-skelter. Madame Husson had taken Isidore's arm and was giving him much counsel, urgent and sound.

"They stopped before the greengrocer's door and the May King was left in his mother's house.

"She had not come home. Invited by her family to take part in the celebration of her son's triumph, she had lunched with her sister, after having followed the procession to the banqueting tent.

"So Isidore remained alone in the shop, into which darkness was penetrating.

"He sat down on a chair, flushed with wine and pride, and looked around him. The carrots, cabbages and onions filled the closed room with their strong vegetable smell, a rude, earthy odour, with which was mingled the sweet, penetrating smell of strawberries and the delicate, evasive perfume of a basket of peaches.

"The May King took one and ate it with big bites, though his belly was round as a pumpkin. Then suddenly, delirious with joy, he began to dance; and something rattled in his gown.

"He was surprised, and plunged his hands into his pockets and drew out the purse with the five hundred francs, which he had forgotten in his drunken joy. Five hundred francs! What a fortune! He poured out the louis on the counter and spread them out with a slow, caressing movement of his great open palm, in order to see them all at once. There were twenty-five, twenty-five round coins, in gold! all in gold. They shone on the wood in the deep gloom, and he counted them over and over again, placing his finger on each one and murmuring:

"'One, two, three, four, five—a hundred; six, seven, eight, nine, ten—two hundred.'

"Then he put them back in the purse, which he replaced in his pocket.

"Who could know and who could describe the terrible conflict waged in the May King's soul between good and evil, the tumultuous onset of Satan, the subtle tricks, the temptations that he hurled against this timid, virgin heart? What suggestions, what imaginings, what covetous desires did the Evil One invent to provoke and destroy this chosen soul? Madame Husson's elect seized his hat, the hat that still bore the little bunch of orange-blossom, and, going out by the little lane at the back of the house, disappeared into the night. . . .

"Virginie, the greengrocer, warned that her son had returned, came back almost at once and found the house empty. She waited, without qualms at first: then, at the end of a quarter of an hour, she made inquiries. Her neighbours in the Rue Dauphine had seen Isidore come in, but had not seen him go out again. Then they went to look for him, but they found no trace of him. The greengrocer, dismayed, ran to the Town Hall: the Mayor knew nothing, except that he had left the May King at the door of his home. Madame Husson had just gone to bed when she was informed that her protégé had disappeared. She put on her wig again, got up and went herself to the greengrocer's. Virginie, whose simple soul was easily moved, was weeping copiously in the middle of her cabbages, carrots and onions.

"An accident was feared. But what? Commandant Desbarres informed the police, who made a round of the town; and on the way to Pontoise they found the little bunch of orange-blossom. It was laid on a table, around which the authorities held counsel. The M... must have been the victim of some ruse, some trick of jealousy: but how? What means had been employed to carry off this innocent, and to what end?

"Weary of the vain search, the authorities retired to bed. Virginie, all alone, lay awake in tears.

"Now, the following evening, when the coach from Paris passed through on its way back, the town of Gisors heard with amazement that its May King had stopped the vehicle two hundred yards out of the town, had got in, and paid for his seat with a louis, for which he had received the change, and that he had quietly left the coach in the heart of the great city.

"Feeling ran very high in the district. Letters were exchanged between the Mayor and the Chief of the Paris Police, but resulted in no discovery.

"Day followed day, the week ran out.

"Then, one morning, Dr. Barbesol noticed, sitting on the threshold of a door, a man clad in dirty linen, asleep with his head against the wall. He approached, and recognised Isidore. He tried to waken him, and was unable to do so. The ex-May King was in a deep sleep, uncannily deep, and the doctor, surprised, went in search of help to carry the young man to Boucheval, the chemist's. When they lifted him up, an empty bottle appeared, hidden under him; the doctor sniffed it and declared that it had contained brandy. It was a hint as to the remedies required. They succeeded.

"Isidore was drunk, drunk and besotted by eight days of debauchery, drunk and so disgusting that a rag-picker wouldn't have touched him. His beautiful vesture of white linen was all rags and tatters, dirty, yellow, greasy, muddy, torn, beggarly; and his person smelt of all the odours of the sewer, the gutter and vice.

"He was washed, preached at, locked up, and, for four days did not stir out of the house. He seemed ashamed and penitent. They had failed to find on him either the purse with the five hundred francs, or the little savings-book, or even his silver watch, a sacred heirloom bequeathed to him by his father the fruiterer.

"On the fifth day, he ventured into the Rue Dauphine. Many curious glances followed him, and he went past the houses with bent head and furtive eyes. He vanished from sight at the point where the country opens out into the valley; but two hours later he reappeared, hiccuping and reeling against the walls. He was drunk, dead drunk.

"Nothing could cure him.

"Driven out by his mother, he became a carter and drove the coal wagons for the firm of Pougrisel, which is still in existence.

"His fame as a drunkard became so great and extensive that, even at Evreux, they speak of Madame Husson's May King, and the drunken scoundrels of the district have preserved this nickname.

"A good action is never wasted."

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Dr. Marambot rubbed his hands together as he ended his story. I asked him:

"Did you know the May King personally?"

"Oh, yes, I had the honour of closing his eyes."

"What did he die of?"

"From an attack of delirium tremens, of course!"

We had arrived by this time at the old fortress, a pile of ruined walls surmounted by the high tower of Saint Thomas of Canterbury, and the tower called the Prisoner's Tower.

Marambot told me the story of this prisoner who, by means of a nail, covered the walls of his cell with sculpture, following the movements of the sun through the narrow cleft of a loophole.

Then I learned that Clotaire II had given the patrimony of Gisors to his cousin Saint Romain, that Gisors ceased to be the capital of all Vexin after the Treaty of Saint-Claire-sur-Epte, that the town was the salient strategic point of the whole of this part of France, and that by reason of this natural advantage it had been captured and recaptured times without number. By order of Guillaume le Roux, the celebrated engineer Robert de Belesme constructed there a strong fortress, later attacked by Louis le Gros, then by the Norman barons, defended by Robert de Candos, yielded finally to Louis le Gros by Geoffrey Plantagenet, retaken by the English through the Templars' treachery, quarrelled over by Philippe Auguste and Richard Cœur de Lion, burned by Edward III of England, who failed to take the

castle, rebuilt by the English in 1419, surrendered later to Charles VII by Richard de Marbury, taken by the Duke of Calabria, occupied by the League, lived in by Henry IV, etc., etc.

And Marambot, with deep conviction, roused almost to eloquence, repeated :

"What villains the English are ! What drunken scoundrels, my friend ; May Kings, every one of them, the hypocrites !"

He was silent, then stretched his arm towards the thread of river gleaming in the meadow.

"Do you know that Henry Monnier was one of the people who fished regularly on the banks of the Epte ?"

"No, I didn't know."

"And Bouffé, old man, Bouffé made stained glass here."

"Well, I never !"

"He did. How is it you don't know all that ?"

CHECKMATE

I WAS GOING TO TURIN BY WAY OF CORSICA. AT NICE I took ship for Bastia, and as soon as we were out at sea I saw a charming, quietly-dressed young woman sitting on the bridge: she was looking out to sea. "Ah," I said to myself, "there's my friend for the voyage."

I took a seat opposite her and looked at her, my mind filled with the questions that leap into any man's mind when he sees an unknown and interesting woman: what was her class, her age, what sort of a woman was she? Then, from what he can see, he speculates on what he can't see. Eye and mind peer through the bodice and under the gown. He observes the line of the bust when she is seated: he tries to catch a glimpse of her ankle: he notes the texture of her hand, which reveals the fineness of the rest of her limbs, and the shape and size of her ear, which is a truer indication of birth than a birth certificate, that must always be open to dispute. He tries to hear her speak, to get at the character of her mind and the tenderness of her heart through the tones of her voice. For, to the experienced observer, the pitch and all the subtle gradations of the spoken word reveal the mysterious structure of the soul: difficult though it may be to grasp it, there is always perfect accord between thought itself and the organ of its expression.

So I observed my neighbour attentively, watching the signs, analysing her movements, keeping my eyes open for the revelations her every attitude would make.

She opened a small bag and took out a newspaper. I

rubbed my hands : " Tell me what you read, and I will tell you what you are."

She began at the leading article with the air of a person savouring a delicate pleasure. The name of her paper leaped to my eyes : *Echo de Paris*. I was puzzled. She was reading one of Scholl's scandalous commentaries. Devil take her, she read Scholl. . . . Scholl. She began to smile : a pointed jest. So she was not a prude, or an innocent. So much the better. A reader of Scholl—yes, a lover of our native wit, its fine shades, and its salt, even its pepper. A good sign. I thought : let us try her on another tack.

I went and sat near her, and began to read, no less attentively, a volume of poetry that I had bought for the journey : the *Chanson d'amour* by Félix Frank.

I observed that she had caught the name on the binding with one rapid glance, as a bird on the wing catches a fly. Several passengers, men, walked past us to look at her. But she seemed to think of nothing but her column of town scandal. When she had finished it, she laid her paper down between us.

I bowed and said :

" May I glance through your paper ? "

" Certainly."

" Do you care to look at this volume of verse in the meantime ? "

" Yes, certainly. Is it amusing ? "

The question puzzled me slightly. It is not usual to ask if a collection of verse is amusing. I answered :

" It's better than that ; it's charming, delicate, and the work of an artist."

" Give it to me, then."

She took the book, opened it, and began to glance through it with a vaguely surprised air that made it clear she rarely read verse.

Some of it seemed to move her, some made her smile, but a different smile from the one she had worn when reading her paper.

I asked her suddenly :

"Do you like it?"

"Yes, but I like amusing things myself, very amusing things : I'm not sentimental."

We began to talk. I learned that she was the wife of a captain of dragoons, stationed at Ajaccio, and that she was going to join her husband.

I very soon guessed that she had little love for this husband of hers. She did love him, but with the mild affection a woman retains for a husband who has not fulfilled the hopes roused in courting days. He had drifted from garrison to garrison, through a number of small, dull towns, such very dull towns ! Now he was stationed in this island, which must be very gloomy indeed. No, every one's life was not amusing. She would rather have gone on living at Lyons with her parents, for she knew every one in Lyons. But now she had to go to Corsica. The Minister really treated her husband pretty badly, although he had an excellent service record.

And we discussed the places where she would have liked to live.

"Do you like Paris?" I asked.

"Oh," she cried, "do I like Paris? How can you ask such a question?"

And she began talking about Paris with such ardent enthusiasm, such wild envy, that I thought : "This is the right string to touch."

She adored Paris from afar, with a passion of repressed gluttony, with the exaggerated longing of a provincial and the maddened impatience of a caged bird who all day looks at a wood from the window where he hangs.

She began to question me, stammering in an agony of impatience: she wanted to be told everything, everything, in five minutes. She knew the names of all the famous people, and of many others whom I had never heard mentioned.

"How is M. Gounod? And M. Sardou? Oh, how I love M. Sardou's plays! How amusing and witty they are! Every time I see one, I dream of it for a week. I've read a book of M. Daudet's, too, which I enjoyed enormously. *Sapho*—do you know it? Is M. Daudet nice-looking? Have you seen him? And M. Zola, what is he like? If you only knew how *Germinal* made me cry! Do you remember the little child who dies in the dark? How terrible that is! It nearly made me ill. There's nothing to laugh at in that, my word. I've read a book of M. Bourget's, too, *Cruelle Énigme*. I have a cousin who was so excited about this novel that she wrote to M. Bourget. I thought the book too romantic. I like something humorous better. Do you know M. Grévin? And M. Coquelin? And M. Damala? And M. Rochefort? They say he's a great wit. And M. de Cassagnac? Is it true that he fights a duel every day? . . ."

Somewhere about the end of an hour, her stock of questions began to run low, and having satisfied her curiosity by the wildest flights of imagination, I was able to talk myself.

I told her stories about the doings of society. Parisian society, real society. She listened with all her ears and all her heart. She must indeed have gathered a pretty picture of the fair and famous ladies of Paris. There was nothing but love-affairs, assignations, speedy conquests and impassioned defeats. She kept asking me:

"Oh, is real society like that?"

I smiled as one who knows:

"Of course. It's only the middle-class women who lead a dull, monotonous life for the sake of their virtue, a virtue for which no one thanks them."

And I set myself to undermine virtue with tremendous strokes of irony, philosophy and nonsense. I made magnificent and graceful fun of the poor wretches who let themselves grow old without ever having known the good things of life, the sweet, tender, gallant things that life offers, without ever having savoured the delicious pleasure of long, burning stolen kisses, and all just because they have married a worthy dolt of a husband, the reserve of whose marital embraces allows them to go to their graves in ignorance of all the refinements of sensual pleasure and all the delicate ecstasies of love.

Then I cited further anecdotes, anecdotes of *cabinets particuliers*, intrigues which I swore were common knowledge. And the refrain of all my tales was a discreet, veiled eulogy of swift, secret love, of sensations snatched in passing, like fruit, and forgotten as soon as enjoyed.

Night fell, a calm, warm night. The big ship, shaken from stem to stern by its engines, glided over the sea, under the vast roof of the wine-dark sky, starred with fire.

The little provincial was not talking now. She drew slow breaths and sometimes sighed. Suddenly she rose.

"I'm going to bed," said she. "Good night, Monsieur."

She shook hands with me.

I knew that on the following evening she would have to take the coach that runs from Bastia to Ajaccio across the mountains, making the journey by night.

I answered:

"Good night, Madame."

And I, too, betook myself to the bunk in my cabin.

First thing next day, I took three places inside the coach, all three places, for myself.

As I was climbing into the old carriage that was going to leave Bastia at nightfall, the conductor asked me if I would not agree to give up one corner to a lady.

I asked brusquely :

"To what lady?"

"To the wife of an officer going to Ajaccio."

"Tell the lady that I shall be glad if she will occupy one of the seats."

She arrived, having, she said, been asleep all day. She apologised, thanked me and got in.

The coach was a sort of hermetically sealed box, into which light entered only through the two doors. So there we were shut up together inside. The carriage proceeded at a trot, a quick trot; then began to follow the mountain road. A fresh, powerful scent of aromatic herbs drifted in through the lowered panes, the heady scent that Corsica so pours out into the surrounding air that sailors passing out at sea smell it, a pungent scent like the smell of bodies, like the sweat of the green earth impregnated with perfumes drawn out by the ardent sun and given to the passing wind.

I began to talk of Paris again, and again she listened to me with feverish attention. My stories grew daring, subtly *décolleté* : I used allusive, two-edged words, words that set the blood on fire.

The night was on us. I could see nothing now, not even the white patch that had been the girl's face. Only the coachman's lantern flung a ray of light over the four horses, that were climbing the road at a walking pace.

Sometimes for a little while, until it died away in the distance behind us, we heard the sound of a torrent dashing over the rocks, and mingling with the sound of little bells.

Gently I stretched out my foot and met hers, which was not withdrawn. Then I sat still, waiting, and suddenly, changing my tune, I talked tenderly, affectionately. I had

reached out my hand and touched hers. She did not withdraw that either. I went on talking, nearer her ear, very near her mouth. Already I felt her heart beating against my breast. It was beating quickly and loudly—a good sign—then, slowly, I pressed my lips on her neck, sure that I had her, so sure that I would have wagered any money on it.

But all at once she started as if she had awakened, started so violently that I reeled to the other end of the coach. Then, before I was able to understand, to reflect, to think at all, I first of all received five or six staggering slaps, then a shower of blows rained on me, sharp, savage blows that struck me all over, unable as I was to parry them in the profound darkness that covered the struggle.

I put out my hands, trying vainly to seize her arms. Then, not knowing what else to do, I turned sharply round, and presented my back to her furious attack, hiding my head in the corner of the panels.

She seemed to guess, perhaps from the sound of her blows, this despairing manoeuvre, and abruptly ceased to beat me.

A few seconds later she was back in her corner and had begun to cry, and she sobbed wildly for an hour at least.

I had seated myself again, very distressed and very much ashamed. I would have liked to speak to her, but what should I say? I could think of nothing! Apologise? That would be absurd. What would you have said! No more than I did, I'll take my oath.

She was crying softly now, and sometimes uttering deep sighs that filled me with grief and compassion. I would have liked to comfort her, to caress her as if she had been an unhappy child, to ask her pardon, kneel to her. But I did not dare.

These situations are too stupid.

She grew quiet at last, and we remained each in our own corner, still and silent, while the carriage rolled on, stopping now and then for fresh horses. We both shut our eyes very quickly at these halts, to avoid seeing one another when the bright light of a stable lantern shone into the coach. Then the coach set out again; and all the time the pungent, scented air of the Corsican mountains caressed our cheeks and our lips, and went to my head like wine.

Christ, what a glorious journey it would have been if . . . if my companion had not been such a little fool.

But gradually light filtered into the carriage, the pale light of early dawn. I looked at my neighbour. She was pretending to be asleep. The sun, risen behind the mountains, filled with its radiance a vast blue gulf set around with great, granite-crested peaks. On the edge of the bay a white town came into sight, still lying in shadow.

Then my neighbour pretended to wake, she opened her eyes (they were red), she opened her mouth as if she were yawning and had been asleep a long time. She hesitated, blushed and stammered:

"Shall we be there soon?"

"Yes, Madame, in an hour or so."

She added, gazing into space:

"It is very tiring to spend the night in a carriage."

"Yes, it breaks one's back."

"Especially after a crossing."

"Yes."

"Is not that Ajaccio in front of us?"

"Yes, Madame."

"I wish we were there."

"I am sure you do."

Her voice sounded a little troubled; her manner was rather awkward, her glance did not meet mine very readily. But she seemed to have forgotten the whole episode.

I admired her. What instinctive intriguers these creatures are ! What diplomatists !

We did, indeed, arrive in another hour ; and a tall dragoon, with the figure of a Hercules, was standing in front of the office ; he waved a handkerchief as the coach came in sight.

My neighbour flung herself wildly into his arms, and kissed him at least twenty times, repeating :

"Are you all right ? How I have been aching to see you again !"

My trunk was handed down from the roof and I was discreetly withdrawing when she cried :

"Oh, you are going away without saying good-bye to me."

I stammered :

"Madame, I did not wish to intrude on your happiness."

Then she said to her husband :

"Thank this gentleman, darling : he has been most kind to me on the journey. He even offered me a place in the coach which he had reserved for himself. It is nice to meet with such friendly companions."

The husband took my hand and thanked me warmly.

The young wife watched us with a smile. I must have looked a rare fool.

HYDROPHOBIA ?

MY DEAR GENEVIEVE, YOU ASK ME TO TELL YOU ABOUT MY honeymoon. How shall I dare? Sly wretch that you are, never to tell me anything, upon my word, not even the least hint. Just think, you've been married for eighteen months, you pretend to be my best friend, you never kept anything from me before, and you hadn't the kindness to warn me. If you'd only given me a hint, if you'd put me on my guard about it, if you'd let the least suspicion penetrate to my mind, the very least, you would have saved me from making such a fool of myself that I still blush about it, and my husband will laugh about it till the day he dies, and no one but you is to blame for it.

I have made myself frightfully ridiculous for ever, I have made one of those mistakes one never forgets, through your fault, your fault, you bad girl. . . . Oh, if I'd only known!

Well, I'm growing bolder as I write and I think I'll tell you the whole story. But promise me you won't laugh too much.

Don't expect a comedy. It's a drama.

You remember my wedding. I had to leave the same evening for my honeymoon. I was certainly not much like Paulette, whose story Gyp has told so amusingly in her witty novel, *Autour du Mariage*. And if my mother had said to me, as Madame d'Hautretan said to her daughter: "Your husband will take you in his arms . . . and . . ." I should assuredly not have replied as Paulette did, shouting with laughter: "Don't go on, mamma . . . I know all that as well as you do. . . ."

I knew nothing at all, and mamma, poor mamma who is

frightened of the least thing, had not even dared to approach this delicate subject.

Well, at five o'clock in the evening, after the luncheon, they announced that the carriage was waiting for me. The guests had gone, I was ready. I can remember still the sound of the trunks being brought down the staircase, and the nasal voice of papa, who did not want to show that he was crying. As he embraced me, the poor man said: "Be brave," as though I were going to have a tooth out. As for mamma, she was a fountain. My husband was hurrying me away to escape these difficult farewells; I was in tears myself, although I was very happy. I can't explain that, but it's none the less true. Suddenly I felt something tugging at my gown. It was Bijou, quite forgotten since the morning. The poor beast was saying good-bye to me after his fashion. It went to my heart a little, and I was wild to kiss my dog. I snatched him up (you know he's the size of my fist) and began to cover him with kisses. I adore caressing animals. It gives me a soft pleasure, a sort of thrill, it's heavenly.

As for Bijou, he was like a mad thing, he pawed me, licked me and nibbled me as he does when he's very happy. Suddenly he took hold of my nose with his teeth and I felt him hurt me. I gave a little cry and put the dog on the ground. He had given me a real bite in play. I was bleeding. Everybody was very distressed. They brought water, vinegar and bandages, and my husband wanted to look after me himself. It was nothing, however, two tiny holes like the pricks made by a needle. In five minutes the blood had stopped and I set off.

We had decided to travel in Normandy for about six weeks.

We reached Dieppe in the evening. When I say "evening" I mean midnight.

You know how I love the sea. I declared to my husband that I would not go to bed without having seen it. He seemed very amazed. I laughed and asked him :

"Are you sleepy?"

He answered :

"No, my dear, but surely you understand that I am longing to be alone with you."

I was surprised.

"Alone with me? But we've been alone in the train all the way from Paris."

He smiled.

"Yes . . . but . . . in the train, it's not the same thing as being alone in our room."

I would not give in :

"Well, we shall be alone on the seashore, and that's that."

That certainly did not please him. However, he said :

"Very well, since you wish it."

It was a glorious night, one of those nights that fill the imaginative with vast, dim ideas, felt rather than thought, a night to make one long to open one's arms, spread one's wings, embrace the whole sky—I don't know. But it seems as if one might be just on the verge of understanding strange mysteries.

There is a Dream in the air, and Romance that pierces the heart, and happiness that does not belong to this earth, a sort of divine intoxication born of stars, and moon, and moving silvered water. Life holds no better moments. They make one's life seem different, touched to beauty, delicately rare; they are like a revelation of what might be . . . or what will be.

My husband, however, seemed impatient to return. "Are you cold?" I asked him. "No. Then look at that little boat over there: it seems asleep on the water. We couldn't

find a lovelier place than this, could we? I would gladly stay here until daylight. Tell me, wouldn't you like us to wait for the dawn?"

He thought that I was making fun of him, and he dragged me back to the hotel almost by force. If I had only known! Oh, the wretch!

When we were alone I felt ashamed, awkward, without knowing why, I assure you. At last I sent him away into the drawing-room and I got into bed. Oh, my dear, how can I tell you? But here it is. He must have taken my utter innocence for shyness, my utter simplicity for depravity, my trustful and artless freedom for deliberate coquetry, and he did not trouble himself to be as delicately discreet and kind as he ought to have been to make such mysteries explicable, understandable and acceptable to an unsuspecting and absolutely unprepared mind.

And, all at once, I thought that he had lost his head. Then I was overcome with fear and I asked him if he wanted to kill me. When you are terror-stricken, you don't reason, you don't think at all, you just go mad. In an instant, I imagined the most frightful things. I thought of the news items in the newspapers, of mysterious crimes, of all the stories whispered about young girls who have married wicked men. Did I know this man? I struggled, repulsed him, mad with fear. I even tore out a handful of his hair, and one side of his moustache; the effort freed me, and I leaped up, shouting "Help." I ran to the door, drew back the bolts and rushed out on to the staircase, almost naked.

Other doors opened. Men in night-shirts appeared, with lights in their hands. I fell into the arms of one of them, and implored him to protect me. He threw himself on my husband.

I don't know what happened after that. They fought and shouted; then they laughed; I've never heard such

laughter. The whole house laughed, from cellar to attic. I heard loud bursts of merriment in the corridors, and in the bedrooms above. The scullions were laughing in the garrets, and the porter writhed on his mattress in the hall.

Think of it, in a hotel !

When it was all over, I was left alone again with my husband, who gave me some brief explanations, much as he might have explained a chemical experiment before trying it. He was by no means pleased. I wept until it grew light, and we went away as soon as the hotel doors were opened.

That's not all.

Next day, we arrived at Pourville, which is still only the beginnings of a seaside town. My husband overwhelmed me with little attentions and kindnesses. After his first annoyance he seemed altogether delighted. Ashamed and miserable as I was over the previous day's adventure, I made myself as agreeable as anyone could, and as docile. But you can't imagine the horror, the disgust, the hatred almost, with which Henry inspired me since I had learned the monstrous secret that is so carefully hidden from young girls. I felt desperate, so sad I wanted to die, disgusted with everything, tormented by longing to return to my poor parents. The following day, we arrived at Étretat. All the visitors were in a state of great excitement : a young woman, bitten by a little dog, had just died of hydrophobia. A terrible shiver ran down my spine when I heard them talking about it at the hotel table. It suddenly struck me that my nose was paining me, and I felt queer sensations all along my limbs.

I did not sleep that night : I had quite forgotten my husband. Suppose I too was going to die of hydrophobia. The next day I asked the head waiter for details. He told me the most frightful story. I spent the day walking on the cliff. I said nothing, I was thinking. Hydrophobia !

What a horrible death ! Henry asked me : " What's the matter ? You seem sad." " Nothing, nothing," I answered. I stared distractedly at the sea, without seeing it at all : I stared at the farm and the fields, but I could not have said what I was looking at. Not for anything in the world would I have confessed to the thought that was torturing me. I had pains, genuine pains in my nose. I insisted on going back.

As soon as we returned to the hotel, I shut myself in my room to examine the wound. There was nothing to be seen now. There was no mistake about it, however, it was hurting me.

I wrote to my mother at once, a short letter that she must have thought very strange. I demanded an immediate reply to certain unimportant questions. After I had signed it, I added : " Above all, don't forget to give me news of Bijou."

The next day I could not eat, but I refused to see a doctor. I spent the day sitting on the beach watching the bathers in the water. They arrived, some fat, some thin, and all ugly in their frightful costumes ; but I hardly had the heart to laugh. I was thinking : " They're happy, those people. They haven't been bitten. *They'll* live. They have nothing to fear. They can amuse themselves in any way they like. How peaceful they are ! "

I kept lifting my hand to my nose to feel it. Was it swelling up ? As soon as I got back to the hotel, I shut myself in my room to look at it in the glass. Oh, if it had changed colour I should have died on the spot.

That evening, I felt suddenly something like affection for my husband, an affection born of despair. I felt that he was kind, I leaned on his arm. Twenty times I was on the verge of telling him my dreadful secret, but I held my tongue.

He took the most abominable advantage of my self-abandon and my utter exhaustion of spirit. I had not strength enough to resist him, nor even the will. I would have endured anything, suffered anything. The next day, I had a letter from mother. She answered my questions, but did not mention Bijou. I thought at once: "He's dead and they're hiding it from me." Then I wanted to run to the telegraph office to send a wire. A thought stopped me: "If he is really dead, they won't tell me." So I resigned myself to another two days of agony. And I wrote again. I asked them to send me the dog to amuse me, because I was a little bored.

In the afternoon I was seized with a trembling fit. I could not lift a full glass without spilling half the contents. My mind was in a lamentable state. Towards dusk I escaped from my husband and hurried to the church. I prayed for a long time.

On the way back I felt fresh pains in my nose and I went into a chemist's whose shop was lit up. I told him that a friend of mine had been bitten and I asked his advice. But I forgot everything as soon as he said it, my mind was so troubled. I remembered only one thing: "Purgings are often recommended." I bought several bottles of goodness knows what, on the pretext of giving them to my friend.

The dogs I met filled me with horror and a wild desire to take to my heels and run away. Several times I thought that I felt an impulse to bite them too.

I had a horribly restless night. My husband⁴ profited thereby. First thing in the morning, I received a reply from my mother. Bijou, she said, was quite well. But it would be too risky to send him alone by rail like that. So they would not send him to me. He was dead!

I could not sleep again. As for Henry, he snored. He woke up several times. I was exhausted.

The following day, I bathed in the sea. I almost fainted on going into the water, I felt so terribly cold. I was still more distraught by this sensation of bitter cold. My legs shook dreadfully, but the worst pain of all was in my nose.

Someone happened to introduce the local medical inspector to me, a charming man. I led up to my subject very subtly. Then I told him that a few days ago my young dog had bitten me, and I asked him what would have to be done if inflammation set in. He began to laugh and answered :

"In your case, Madame, I could think of only one course, which would be to operate on you."

And as I did not understand, he added :

"And that would be your husband's business."

I was no farther on and no wiser when I left him.

Henry seemed very gay and very happy this evening. We went to the Casino in the evening, but he did not wait for the end of the show before suggesting to me that we should go home. Nothing interested me any more now : I fell in with his wish.

But I could not rest in bed, my nerves were exhausted and on edge. Nor was he any the readier for sleep. He embraced me, caressed me, and was as gentle and tender as if he had at last guessed how I was suffering. I endured his caresses without even realising what he was doing, without thinking about it at all.

But all at once a sudden spasm seized me, the most extraordinary and awful spasm. I uttered one frightful cry, and repulsing my husband, who was holding me closely, I leaped out of bed and threw myself on my face near the door. It was madness, a dreadful madness. I was lost.

Henry, utterly distracted, lifted me up and begged me to tell him what was the matter. But I would not speak. I was resigned now. I waited for death. I knew that after

a few hours' respite, another spasm would seize me, then another, until the last one, which would be fatal.

I let him carry me back to bed. Towards daybreak, my husband's irritating obsessions brought on a fresh attack, which lasted longer than the first. I felt a wild impulse to rend, bite, scream; it was terrible, but less disagreeable than I would have believed.


Towards eight o'clock in the morning, I fell asleep for the first time for four nights.

At eleven o'clock, a beloved voice woke me. It was mamma: my letter had alarmed her, and she had come hurrying to see me. She held a large hamper in her hand and suddenly I heard barks coming from it. I snatched it, quite distraught, and wild with hope. I opened it, and Bijou jumped on to the bed; he caressed me, and frisked about, and rolled on my pillow, quite mad with joy.

Well, my darling, believe me or not, as you like . . . I only understood next day.

What tricks our imagination can play us! To think what I imagined! Tell me, isn't it too stupid? . . .

I have never, you understand, don't you, confessed to anyone the tortures I suffered during those four days. Suppose my husband had known. He makes enough fun of me already over our Dieppe adventure. For the matter of that, his jests don't trouble me much. I am used to them. One gets used to everything in this life. . . .



THE MODEL

THE LITTLE TOWN OF ÉTRETAT, CURVED LIKE THE CRESCENT moon, with its white cliffs, white pebbly strand and blue sea, drowsed under the sun of a day in mid-July. At the two points of the crescent, the two harbours, the small one on the right, the big one on the left, thrust out into the quiet water a dwarf foot and the foot of a colossus; and the needle, almost as high as the cliff, broad-based and tapering to the summit, reared its pointed head towards the sky.

On the beach, beside the waves, a crowd of people sat watching the bathers. On the terrace of the Casino more people sat or walked, spreading out under the brilliant sky into a garden of gay frocks blazing with red and blue umbrellas, embroidered on top with silken flowers.

On the promenade at the end of the terrace, other people, the quiet unassuming ones, sauntered, far from the elegant crowd.

A young man, a well-known, celebrated artist, Jean Summer by name, was walking gloomily beside a small invalid carriage in which a young woman was lying, his wife. A servant was gently pushing this sort of wheeled arm-chair, and the cripple gazed sadly at the joyful sky, the joyful day and the joyful crowd.

They did not speak. They did not look at each other.

"Let us stop a little," said the young woman.

They stopped, and the painter seated himself on a folding chair, which the manservant produced for him.

People passing behind the still, silent couple looked at

them pityingly. Gossip had created a whole legend of devotion. He had married her in spite of her infirmity, touched by her love, they said.

A little farther off, two young men were talking, sitting on a capstan, gazing into space.

"No, it's not true. I tell you I know Jean Summer very well."

"Well, but why did he marry her? She was already a cripple before her marriage, wasn't she?"

"Exactly. He married her . . . he married her . . . as a man does marry, dammit, because he's a fool!"

"But what else?"

"What else . . . what else, my friend? There is nothing else. A man is an ass because he's an ass. And besides, you know very well that painters are particularly given to ridiculous marriages; almost all of them marry models, old mistresses, women soiled in one way or another. Why is it? Who knows? One would suppose, on the contrary, that the constant society of that flock of imbeciles called models ought to have filled men with a lasting disgust for that brand of female. Not at all. After making them pose, they marry them. Read Alphonse Daudet's little book, which is so true, so cruel and so fine: *Les Femmes d'Artistes*.

"Fate intervened with the couple you see there in a very special and terrible way. The little woman staged a comedy, or rather a terrifying drama. She risked all to gain all, in short. Was she sincere? Did she love Jean? Can one ever be sure of that? Could anyone say for certain what is carefully planned and what is spontaneous in the things women do? Their sincerity reflects faithfully a constant change of mood. They are impassioned, wicked, devoted, admirable, depraved, in obedience to uncontrollable emotions. They lie ceaselessly, neither wishing it, knowing it, nor understanding that they are lying, and they have, with it



and in spite of it, an absolute freshness of emotions and sentiments which they evidence in violent, unexpected, incomprehensible, crazy resolutions, that confound our reasoning, our customary calculations and our egoistic habits of thought. The abrupt and unpremeditated nature of their decisions makes them for us eternally undecipherable enigmas. Always we wonder: 'Are they sincere? Are they false?'

"But, my friend, they are at once sincere and false, because it is their nature to be both to the utmost and to be neither the one nor the other.

"Think of the methods the most honest of them use to get what they want from us. Their methods are both complicated and simple. So complicated that we never guess them beforehand, so simple that after we have fallen victims we can't help being surprised at it and saying to ourselves: 'What, did she play a crude trick like that on me?'

"And they are always successful, my dear fellow, especially when it is marriage they are after.

"But listen to Summer's story.

"The little woman is a model, of course. She posed for him. She was pretty, distinguished-looking too, and had, it seems, a divine figure. He fell in love with her, as a man does fall in love with any rather attractive woman whom he sees constantly. He imagined that he loved her with his whole heart. That's an odd phenomenon. As soon as a man desires a woman, he is sincerely convinced that he could never tire of her for the rest of his life. He knows quite well that the thing has happened to him already; that disgust always follows possession; that the necessary condition of being able to spend the whole of one's life with another being is not a brutish, physical appetite, quickly sated, but a similarity of mind, temperament and disposition.



He must be able to decide whether the charm that holds him comes from the corporeal form, from a sort of drunkenness of the senses, or from a deeper spiritual beauty.

"Well, he imagined that he loved her; he made her a host of promises of faithfulness and he took her to live with him.

"She was really a nice little thing, and had that graceful, puckish charm our Parisian little ladies so often have. She chattered like a magpie, she prattled, she said absurd things that seemed witty because of the droll way she uttered them. The gracious gestures she used every moment were well calculated to charm the eye of a painter. When she lifted her arms, when she stooped, when she stepped into a carriage, when she held out her hand to you, her movements were perfectly proportioned and harmonious.

"For three months, Jean never noticed that at bottom she was just like all other models.

"They rented a little house at Andrésy for the summer.

"I was there one evening, when the first doubts stirred in my friend's mind.

"It was a radiant night, and we chose to walk along the river bank. The moon poured a rain of light on the rippling water, scattered its broken, yellow rays over eddies and running water, and all the wide slow-moving reeds.

"We walked along the bank; the vague sense of exaltation born of such romantic nights had rather gone to our heads. We would have liked to achieve superhuman tasks, to love unknown creatures of rare poetic kind. We felt stirring in us ecstasies, desires, strange aspirations. And we were silent, filled with the serene, living coolness of lovely night, with the cool beauty of the moon that seems to run through one's body, filling it full, flooding the mind, lending it fragrance, drowning it in sweet content.

"All at once Josephine (she was called Josephine) uttered a cry :

" ' Oh, did you see the great big fish that jumped over there ? ' "

" He answered carelessly, not looking :

" ' Yes, darling. ' "

" She was annoyed :

" ' No, you didn't see it, because you had your back to it. ' "

" He smiled :

" ' Yes, that's true. It is so lovely that I am not thinking of anything. ' "

" She was silent ; but a moment later she was seized with a desire to talk, and she asked :

" ' Shall you go to Paris to-morrow ? ' "

" ' I don't know, ' he said deliberately.

" She was irritated again :

" ' Do you think it's amusing, walking in complete silence ? People talk, unless they're idiots. ' "

" He did not answer. Then, well aware, thanks to her perverse woman's instinct, that she would exasperate him, she began to sing that maddening air with which our ears and minds have been wearied for the last two years :

Je regardais en l'air.

" He murmured :

" ' Please be quiet. ' "

" ' Why should I be quiet ? ' she demanded furiously.

" ' You're spoiling the landscape, ' he answered.

" Then the scene began, the ugly idiotic scene, with its baseless reproaches, its misplaced recriminations, then tears. It came and went. They returned home. He had let her run on without replying to her, lulled by the beauty of the evening and stunned by her insane outburst.

" Three months later, he was struggling desperately in

the strong, unseen bonds which these affairs twist round our lives. She held him, exhausted him, tormented him. They quarrelled, insulted each other, and fought from morning until night.

"Finally, he decided to end it, to break with her at all costs. He sold all his canvases, borrowed some money from friends, realised twenty thousand francs (he was still hardly known) and one morning left them for her on the chimney-piece with a letter.

"He came and took refuge in my house.

"About three o'clock in the afternoon, there was a ring at the door. I went to open it. A woman leapt at me, pushed me aside, entered and penetrated to my studio; it was she.

"He had risen when he saw her enter.

"With a truly magnificent gesture, she threw the envelope containing the bank-notes at his feet, and said shortly :

" 'There's your money. I don't want it.'

"She was very pale, trembling, and certainly ready for any folly. As for him, I saw him turn pale too, turn pale with anger and exasperation, ready, perhaps, for any violence.

"He asked :

" 'What is it you want?'

"She answered :

" 'I won't be treated like a harlot. You implored me, you took me. I didn't ask you for anything. Keep me with you.'

"He stamped his foot.

" 'No, this is too much. If you think you're going to. . . .'

"I seized him by the arm.

" 'Be quiet, Jean. Leave it to me.'

"I walked up to her, and gently, one step at a time, I tried to make her see reason, emptying out all the bagful of arguments one uses in such circumstances. She listened

to me without moving, staring straight in front of her, obstinate.

"Finally, not knowing what else to say, and seeing that the scene could only end badly, I bethought myself of one last resort. I said deliberately :

" ' He still loves you, my dear ; but his family want him to marry, and you realise. . . . '

" She started :

" ' Oh . . . oh . . . I understand then. . . . '

" She turned towards him :

" ' You're going . . . you're going . . . to be married ? '

" He answered firmly :

" ' Yes. '

" She took a step forward :

" ' If you marry, I'll kill myself . . . do you hear ? '

" He shrugged his shoulders and said calmly :

" ' All right . . . kill yourself ! '

" A frightful anguish clutched at her throat but she managed to get out two or three times :

" ' What did you say ? . . . what did you say ? . . . what did you say ? Repeat it. '

" He repeated :

" ' All right, kill yourself, if it'll amuse you. '

" She grew terrifyingly pale and replied :

" ' You'd better not drive me too far. I'll throw myself out of the window. '

" He burst out laughing, walked across to the window, opened it, and bowing like a person politely making way for another to go first, said :

" ' The way is open. After you ! '

" For a moment she stared at him with a wild, distorted stare ; then, taking off as if she were jumping a hedge in the country, she jumped past me, past him, cleared the railing and disappeared. . . .

"I shall never forget the effect that this open window made on me, after seeing that body leap past it and fall : in one moment it seemed in my sight wide as the sky and empty as space. I recoiled instinctively, not daring to look, as though I should fall myself.

"Jean, stunned, never moved.

"They picked up the poor girl with both legs broken. She will never walk again.

"Her lover, wild with remorse, and feeling perhaps a touch of gratitude, took her back and married her.

"There you are, my dear."

The evening came. The young woman grew chilly and wished to go. The servant began to wheel the little invalid carriage towards the village. The painter walked beside his wife ; they had not exchanged a single word for an hour past.

THE BARONESS

"YOU MIGHT SEE SOME INTERESTING PIECES THERE," MY friend Boisrené said. "Come with me."

He took me to the first floor of a beautiful house in one of the big Paris streets. We were received by a very agreeable man, with perfect manners, who led us from room to room, and showed us rare pieces, negligently mentioning the price. Vast sums, ten, twenty, thirty, fifty thousand francs, fell from his lips with so much grace and ease that no one could doubt that millions were locked up in the safe belonging to this man-of-the-world dealer.

I had long known him by repute. Very clever, very subtle-witted, very intelligent, he acted as intermediary in all sorts of transactions. He was in touch with all the richest amateurs in Paris, and even in Europe and America; he knew their tastes and their latest crazes, and he wrote or wired the news to such as lived in distant towns, as soon as ever any piece came into the market which was likely to interest them.

Members of the best families, who found themselves in a temporary embarrassment, had recourse to him, it might be to find money for gambling, it might be to pay a debt, or to sell a picture, an heirloom, a tapestry, or even a house or an estate, in moments of particular stress.

It was said that he never refused his services when he saw a chance of profit.

Boisrené seemed to be on intimate terms with this curious dealer. They had worked together more than once. I looked at the man with much interest.

He was tall, thin, bald and vastly elegant. His gentle, insinuating voice had a charm of its own, a seductive charm that gave things a special value. When he held a piece in his fingers, he turned it over and over, looking at it so intelligently and subtly, so elegantly and sympathetically, that the thing seemed to take on an immediate added beauty, a transformation wrought by his touch and his glance. It became at once much more valuable in the eyes of the beholder just through having passed from the show-case into his grasp.

"And your Christ?" said Boisrené; "the beautiful Renaissance Christ that you showed me last year?"

The man smiled and answered:

"I sold it, and in a very odd way. It's a real fragment of Parisian life. Would you like to hear it?"

"I should."

"You know Baroness Samoris?"

"Yes and no. I have seen her once, but I know what she is."

"You do really know about her?"

"Yes."

"Tell me what you know, so that I can be sure you're not making a mistake."

"Certainly. Mme Samoris is a woman of the world who has a daughter, though no one ever knew her husband. In any case, if she has not had a husband, she manages her lovers with great discretion, for she is received in a certain section of society, which is either tolerant or blind.

"She goes regularly to church, receives the Sacraments with a devout ostentation, and never compromises herself. She hopes that her daughter will marry well. Is that right?"

"Yes, but I'll complete your information: she is a kept woman whose lovers have a greater respect for her than if she did not sleep with them. It is a rare quality; and the

woman who achieves it can get what she wants from any man. The man whom, all unknown to himself, she has already decided to take, long seeks her favour, desires her and trembles for his audacity, entreats her and is ashamed of entreaty, is amazed when she surrenders, and possesses her with respectful gratitude. He never notices that he is paying her, to such a fine art has she brought the act of taking; she keeps the tone of their relationship so reserved, so dignified, so correct that when he leaves her bed he would assault any man who dared doubt his mistress's virtue. And that in all good faith.

"I have been of service to this woman on several occasions. And she has no secrets from me.

"Well, early in January, she came to me to borrow thirty thousand francs. I did not lend them to her, of course, but as I wanted to oblige her I begged her to tell me exactly how she was placed so that I might know what I could do for her.

"She described the situation in language so extraordinarily discreet that she could not have phrased it more delicately if she had been talking about her little girl's first Communion. I gathered at last that times were hard and she was penniless.

"Thanks to the trade crisis, the political troubles that the present government appears to keep going at will, the rumours of war, and the general unrest, money moved reluctantly, even through lovers' hands. And, besides, a woman of her reputation could not give herself to the first-comer.

"She needed a man of the world, the most exclusive social world, who would crown her reputation while supplying her daily bread. Anyone notorious, however wealthy, would have compromised her daughter beyond hope and made her marriage very problematic. She could not now afford to resort to a professional go-between or shady

intermediaries who could once have extricated her from her difficulties.

"Besides, she had to maintain her establishment, to go on keeping open house, in order not to lose all chance of finding among her many visitors the discreet and distinguished friend for whom she was waiting, whom she would choose.

"I remarked that there was little prospect of my getting back my thirty thousand francs, since when she had run through them, it would be necessary for her to make at least sixty thousand in one haul before she could repay me my half.

"She listened to me in great distress. And I did not know what to suggest, until an idea, a really original idea, flashed across my mind.

"I had just bought the Renaissance Christ I showed you, an admirable piece, quite the most beautiful bit of work in that manner I have ever seen.

" 'My dear friend,' I said to her, 'I am going to send you home this ivory. You will invent an ingenious story for it, a really moving, romantic story, any story you like, to explain your desire to get rid of it. It is, of course, a family treasure inherited from your father.

" 'I will send collectors to you and bring them to you myself. I leave the rest to you. I will let you have all necessary information about them the day before. This Christ is worth fifty thousand francs, but I will let it go for thirty thousand. The difference will be your commission.

"She reflected a few moments with an air of profound gravity, and answered: 'Yes, it might be a good idea. Thank you very much.'

"I had my Christ taken to her house next day, and the same evening I sent her the Baron de Saint-Hospital.

"For three months I went on sending clients to her, my

very best clients, those whose high standing had been amply proved in my business relations with them. But I heard nothing of her.

"Then I had a visit from a foreigner who spoke French very badly, and I decided to take him myself to the Samoris' house to see what was going on.

"A footman in black livery opened the door and showed me into a pretty drawing-room, decorated in subdued colours and furnished in excellent taste. We waited here for some minutes. She appeared, looking charming, shook hands with me, and asked us to sit down; and when I had explained to her the reason of my visit, she rang.

"The footman reappeared.

" 'See whether Mlle Isabella will let us visit her chapel,' she said.

"The girl brought her answer herself. She was fifteen years old, radiant with first youth, and wore an air of modest simplicity.

"She would take us herself to her chapel.

"It was a kind of sacred boudoir where a silver lamp was burning before the Christ, my Christ, which was laid on a bed of black velvet. The whole setting was charming and very clever.

"The child crossed herself, then said to us:

" 'Look at it, gentlemen, is it not lovely?'

"I took the thing up, examined it and pronounced it quite remarkable. The foreigner considered it too, but he seemed much more interested in the two women than in the Christ.

"Their house gave one a feeling of well-being; there was a scent of incense, flowers and perfumes. It was happiness to be there. It was so comfortable a place that one longed to stay.

"When we returned to the drawing-room I broached,

in a reserved and delicate fashion, the question of price. Lowering her glance, Mme Samoris said fifty thousand francs.

"Then she added: 'If you would like to see it again, Monsieur, I rarely go out before three o'clock, and I am at home every day.'

"When we were in the street, the foreigner demanded to be told more about the Baroness, whom he had found altogether exquisite. But I heard nothing further of either of them.

"Another three months went by.

"One morning, less than a fortnight ago, she arrived here at breakfast-time, and laid a pocket-book in my hands: 'My dear, you're an angel. I have brought you fifty thousand francs: I am buying your Christ myself, and I am paying twenty thousand francs more than the price agreed, on condition that you go on sending me . . . sending me clients . . . because he is still for sale . . . my Christ. . . .'"

A SALE

THE DEFENDANTS, BRUMENT (CÉSAIRE-ISIDORE) AND CORNU (Prosper-Napoléon), appeared at the Seine-Inférieure Assizes, charged with attempting the murder, by drowning, of the woman Brument, lawful wife of the former of the said defendants.

The two accused are seated side by side in the dock. They are two peasants. The first is little and stout, with short arms, short legs and a round head; his red face, all bursting with pimples, is fixed, apparently without a neck, on top of a body equally round and equally short. He breeds pigs and lives at Cacheville-la-Goupil, in the district of Criquetot.

Cornu (Prosper-Napoléon) is thin, of medium height, with arms of disproportionate length. He has a crooked face and jaw and he squints. A blue blouse as long as a shirt falls to his knees, and his scant, yellow hair, plastered down on his skull, gives his face a worn, dirty and hideously raddled air. He has been nicknamed "the priest" because he can give a perfect imitation of church hymns and even the sound of the harmonium. He keeps a public-house at Criquetot, and this talent of his attracts to the place a great many customers who prefer "Cornu's mass" to God's own.

Mme Brument, seated on the witnesses' bench, is a skinny peasant woman whose drowsy placidity is never shaken. She sits unmoving, hands crossed on knees, with an unwinking stare and an air of stupidity.

The President proceeds with the examination.

"Well, then, Mme Brument, they entered your house and threw you into a barrel full of water. Tell us the facts in detail. Stand up."

She stands up. She seems as tall as a mast, under the bonnet that covers her head with a white dome. She tells her tale in a drawling voice :

"I was shelling haricots. And then they came in. I thought to myself : 'What's up with them ? They're not themselves ; they're up to mischief.' They looked at me out of the corners of their eyes, like this, especially Cornu, owing to his squint. I don't like to see them together, because they're never up to much good when they're together. I says to them : 'What d'you want with me ?' They didn't answer. I had, as you might say, a suspicion...."

The prisoner Brument interrupted her statement vehemently ; he declared :

"I was tipsy."

Whereupon Cornu, turning towards his fellow-criminal, pronounced in a voice as deep as the note of an organ :

"Say we was both tipsy and that'll be the truth."

The President, severely : "You wish us to understand that you were drunk ?"

Brument : "Yes, I was tipsy all right."

Cornu : "It might happen to anyone."

The President, to the victim : "Proceed with your statement, Mme Brument."

"Well, then Brument said to me : 'D'you want to earn five francs ?' 'Yes,' said I, seeing you don't pick five francs up in every gutter. Then he says to me : 'Keep your eyes open and do as I do,' and then he goes and fetches the big empty barrel that stands under the spout at the corner ; and then he turns it up, and then he carries it into my kitchen, and then he sets it down in the middle of the

floor, and then he says to me: 'Go and fetch water and fill it.'

"So then I goes to the pond with two buckets and I fetch water, and still more water for nigh on an hour, seeing that barrel's as big as a vat, saving your honour, Mr. President.

"While I was doing it, Brument and Cornu had a drink, and then another drink, and then another drink. They were filling themselves up together, and I said: 'It's you that's full, fuller than the barrel.' And then that Brument answers: 'Don't you worry, get on with your job, your turn's coming, every one gets what's coming to them.' I takes no notice of his talk, seeing he was tipsy.

"When the barrel was full to the brim, I says: 'There, I've done it.'

"And then Cornu gives me five francs. Not Brument—Cornu; it was Cornu gave me them. And Brument says to me: 'Do you want to earn another five francs?'

"'Yes,' says I, seeing I'm not used to such presents.

"Then he says to me:

"'Strip.'

"'You want me to strip?'

"'Yes,' he says.

"'How far do you want me to strip?'

"He says to me:

"'If you don't like it, keep your chemise on, we've no objection to that.'

"Five francs is five francs, so I strips, but I didn't like stripping in front of those two good-for-nothings. I takes off my bonnet, and then my bodice, and then my petticoat, and then my sabots. Brument says to me: 'Keep your stockings on, we're decent fellows, we are.'

"And that Cornu repeats: 'We're decent fellows we are.'

"And there I am, like our Mother Eve, as you might say.

And they stands up, but they couldn't stand straight, they was so drunk, saving your honour, Mr. President.

"I says to them: 'What mischief are you up to?'"

"And Brument says: 'Are we ready?'"

"Cornu says: 'Ready it is.'"

"And then they takes me, Brument by the head and Cornu by the feet, as you might say taking up a bundle of dirty clothes. I bawls, I does. And Brument says: 'Shut up, you.'"

"And then they lifts me up in their arms, and sticks me in the barrel full of water, and my blood stood still, I was chilled to my innards.

"And Brument says:

"'Anything else?'"

"Cornu says:

"'No, that's all.'"

"Brument says:

"'The head's not in, and it counts.'"

"Cornu says:

"'Put her head in.'"

"And then Brument pushes in my head as it might be to drown me, until the water ran up my nose and I thought I was seeing Paradise. And he gives me a push. And I went under.

"And then he must have had a fright. He pulled me out and says to me: 'Go quick and dry yourself, skin and bones.'"

"I rushes off and I runs to the priest's, and he lends me a petticoat of his servant's, seeing I'm in my skin, and he goes to fetch Mister Chicot, the village policeman, who goes to Cliquetot to fetch the gendarmes, and they come with me to the house.

"And there we find Brument and Cornu going for each other like two rams.

"Brument was bawling: 'It's not true, I tell you, it's at least a cubic metre. It's the measure that's wrong.'

"Cornu was bawling: 'Four buckets, that doesn't make as much as you could call half a cubic metre. No good talking, it's so!'

"The sergeant takes hold of them. That's all I have to say."

She sat down. There was laughter in the Court. The astonished jurymen stared at each other. The President said solemnly:

"Prisoner Cornu, you appear to be the instigator of this infamous plot. Have you anything to say?"

And Cornu stood up in his turn.

"Your Worship, I was tipsy."

The President replied gravely:

"I know you were. Go on."

"I am going on. Well, Brument came to my place about nine o'clock, and he orders two brandies and says: 'Have one with me, Cornu.' And I sits down with him and drinks and I offers him another, out of politeness. Then he called for two more, and I did the same, and we went on, drinking brandy after brandy, until about twelve we were blind.

"Then Brument begins to cry. I feels very sorry for him. I asks him what's the matter. He says: 'I must have a thousand francs by Thursday.' When I heard that, it turns me cold, you understand. And all of a sudden he comes out with the proposal: 'I'll sell you my wife.'

"I was tipsy and I'm a widower. It fairly got me, you understand. I didn't know his wife, but a wife's a wife, isn't she? I asks him: 'How much will you sell her for?'

"He thinks it over, or rather he pretends to think it over. When a man's tipsy, he's not in his right wits, and he answers: 'I'll sell her by the cubic metre.'

"That doesn't surprise me, seeing I was as tipsy as he was, and I'm used to cubic metres in my business. That's a thousand litres, and I was agreeable to that. Only the price was still to be settled. Everything depends on quality. I says to him: 'How much the cubic metre?'

"He answers:

"'Two thousand francs.'

"I gives a jump like a rabbit, and then I think to myself that a woman can't weigh more than three hundred litres. All the same, I says: 'That's too dear.'

"He answers:

"'I can't take less. I should lose on it.'

"A man isn't a pig-dealer for nothing, you understand. He knows his job. But set a thief to catch a thief, and I'm a sharp man, too. Ah! ah! ah! So I say to him: 'If she was new, I wouldn't say it was too dear, but as you've used her—haven't you?—she's second-hand. I give you fifteen hundred francs the cubic metre, not a ha'penny more. Is it a bargain?'

"He answers:

"'It's a bargain. Shake on it.'

"I shakes and we sets off, arm-in-arm. Folks ought to help each other along in this life.

"But I had a sudden fear: 'How are you going to measure her in litres unless you melt her down?'

"Then he explains his idea, none too easily, seeing he was tipsy. He says: 'I take a barrel, I fill it with water to the brim. I put her inside. All the water that pours over I'll measure out, and that'll be the total.'

"I says:

"'Right, it's agreed. But the water that pours over will run away: what are you going to do to gather it up again?'

"Then he thinks I'm a booby, and he explains that he'll only have to pour back what's run out of the barrel as soon

as his wife has got out of it. The amount of water we had to add, would be the total. I reckon ten buckets: that's a cubic metre. He's not so stupid when he's tipsy, the rascal, all the same!

"To cut it short, we go off to his house, and I examine the goods specified. She's not a pretty woman. Every one can see that for themselves, seeing she's sitting there. I says to myself: 'I've been done; never mind, it's all one': pretty or ugly, a woman's just as much use, isn't she now, Mr. President? And then I see that she's as thin as a match. I says to myself: 'There's not four hundred litres there!' I know what I'm talking about, being used to dealing in liquids.

"She's told you the way we arranged it. I even let her keep her chemise and her stockings on, a clear loss to me.

"When it was over, what d'you think? She runs off. I says: 'Here! Brument, she's getting away.'

"He replies: 'Don't you be afraid, I'll always get her back again. She'll have to come home to go to bed. I'm going to reckon the deficit.'

"We measured it. Not four buckets. Ha, ha, ha, ha!"

The prisoner began to laugh, and continued to laugh until a gendarme was obliged to thump him on the back. Quiet again, he adds:

"To cut it short, Brument declares: 'Nothing doing, it's not enough.' I bawl, he bawls. I bawl louder, he stamps, I thump. That would have gone on till doomsday, seeing I was tipsy.

"Then in come the gendarmes. They curse me, and they play us a dirty trick. Sent to prison. I demand damages."

He sits down.

Brument swears that his fellow-criminal's confession is

true in every respect. The jury, overwhelmed, retired to consider their verdict.

They returned an hour later and acquitted the accused, with severe strictures bearing on the sanctity of marriage, and setting forth in precise terms the limits set to commercial transactions.

Brument, accompanied by his spouse, made his way towards the conjugal hearth.

Cornu returned to his business.

THE ASSASSIN

THE GUILTY MAN WAS DEFENDED BY A VERY YOUNG COUNSEL; it was his first brief, and he spoke as follows :

"The facts, gentlemen of the jury, are undeniable. My client, a respectable man, a model employee, a gentle and timid man, has assassinated his employer in a burst of rage that seems incomprehensible. Will you allow me to explain the psychology of this crime, if I may so call it, extenuating nothing and excusing nothing? You shall judge it after that.

"Jean-Nicholas Lougère is the son of honourable parents, who have brought him up to be a simple-minded and reverent man.

"In that lies his crime : in reverence ! It is a feeling, gentlemen, hardly known among us to-day ; only the word seems to be left, all the force is lost. You must penetrate into certain retired and modest families to rediscover there this austere tradition, this religious devotion to a thing or a man, to a sentiment or a belief still invested with sacred awe, this faith which tolerates neither doubt nor smile, nor the merest whisper of suspicion.

"A man is not an upright man, a really upright man, in the full sense of the phrase, unless he is a reverent one. The reverent man has his eyes shut. He believes. The rest of us, whose eyes are wide open to the world, who live here, in this palace of justice which is the sewer of society, into which every infamy is emptied, we in whose ears are poured every tale of shame, who are the devoted defenders of every human villainy, the sustainers, not to say the *souteneurs*, of every shady character, male and

female, from princes to gutter-snipes, we who welcome with indulgent kindness, with complaisance, with smiling benevolence, every guilty creature to defend them before you, we who, if we truly love our profession, measure our legal sympathy by the greatness of the crime, we cannot retain a reverent mind. We see too closely the flood of corruption that runs from the highest in the State to the lowest dregs of society. We know too well how all decays, how all is given away or sold. Places, office, honours, sold blatantly in exchange for a little gold, delicately in exchange for titles or shares in industrial enterprises, or, more simply, bartered for a woman's kiss. Our duty and our profession force us to be ignorant of nothing, to suspect every one, for all men are suspect; and we are struck with astonishment when we are confronted by a man who, like the assassin seated here before you, is so possessed by the spirit of reverence that he is willing to become a martyr for it.

"We, gentlemen, are honourable, as we are personally clean, from dislike of base actions, from a feeling of personal dignity and pride; but we do not bear in the depths of our hearts a blind, innate, savage faith in honour, as this man does.

"Let me tell you the story of his life.

"He was brought up as children used to be brought up, to regard human actions as divisible into two classes, good and evil. Good was set before him with an irresistible authority, that forced him to distinguish it from evil, as he distinguished day from night. His father was not of those superior beings who look out upon life from a lofty pinnacle, see the origin of faith, and recognise the social needs which created these distinctions.

"So he grew up, pious and trusting, fanatic and narrow-minded.

"At the age of twenty-two he married. He was married

to a cousin whose upbringing had been like his own, who was as simple-minded and as pure as himself. He had the inestimable good fortune to share his life with an honest woman, true-hearted, the rarest of beings and the most worthy of reverence. For his mother he felt the veneration that surrounds the mother in these patriarchal families, the devout worship that is offered only to divinities. He transferred some part of this devotion to his wife, lessened hardly at all by the familiarity of marriage. And he lived absolutely unaware of deceit, in a state of unshakable integrity and tranquil happiness which made him a being apart. Deceiving none, he never suspected that anyone could deceive him.

"Some time before his marriage he had entered as cashier the firm of M. Langlais, whom he recently assassinated.

"We know, gentlemen of the jury, from the evidence of Mme Langlais, of her brother, M. Perthuis, her husband's business associate, from every member of the family and from all the chief employees of the bank, that Lougère was a model employee as regards honesty, obedience, civility and deference to the heads of the business, and regularity of conduct.

"He was treated, moreover, with the consideration due to his exemplary conduct. He was accustomed to this homage and to what was almost the veneration paid to Mme Lougère, whose praises were in every mouth.

"She died of typhoid fever in a few days.

"There can be no doubt that he felt the deepest grief but it was the cold, quiet grief of a heart unused to emotional excess. Only his pallor and the change in his looks showed how deep the wound had gone.

"Then, gentlemen, a very natural thing happened.

"This man had been married for ten years. For ten years he had become used to the constant presence of a woman. He was accustomed to be cared for by her, to

hearing her familiar voice when he came home, to bid her good night and greet her again in the morning, to the gentle swish of her dress, that sound so pleasant in a woman's ear, to the half-passionate, half-motherly caress that lightens the burden of life, to the beloved presence that makes the hours pass less slowly. Perhaps he was accustomed, too, to an indulgent care in the matter of his food, to all the unnoticed attentions that become gradually indispensable to us. He could not live alone now. So, to help him through the interminable evenings, he fell into the habit of going to sit in a neighbouring café. He drank a glass of beer and remained there, stock-still, with an indifferent gaze fixed on the billiard-balls chasing after each other under the cloud of smoke, listening uncomprehendingly to the arguments of the players, to his neighbours' political discussions, and to the bursts of merriment provoked by an occasional heavy witticism at the other end of the room. More often than not, he ended by falling asleep from weariness and boredom. But heart of his heart, flesh of his flesh, was the irresistible need of a woman's heart and a woman's bodily nearness; and unconsciously he drew a little nearer every evening to the counter where the cashier sat enthroned—a little blonde—drawn to her inevitably just because she was a woman.

“Soon they began to talk, and he fell into the habit, a pleasant one for him, of spending every evening near her. She was gracious, and as obliging as is required in such traffic in smiles, and she amused herself by renewing his drinks as often as possible, which was good for business. But day by day Lougère became more attached to this woman whom he did not know, of whose whole manner of life he was ignorant, whom he loved solely because she was the only woman he saw.

“The little blonde, who was no fool, realised very quickly

that she could make profitable use of this simple creature, and she tried to think what would be the best way of exploiting him. The wisest assuredly was to make him marry her.

"She achieved it without any difficulty.

"Need I tell you, gentlemen of the jury, that the conduct of this girl was most irregular, and that marriage, far from checking her escapades, seemed to make them more shameless?

"By a characteristic turn of feminine guile, she seemed to take a pleasure in deceiving this honest man with all the employees in his office. I say, with all. We have the letters, gentlemen. Before long it was a public scandal, of which only the husband, as always, remained in ignorance.

"Finally, this depraved woman, prompted by a self-interest easy to understand, seduced the son of the head himself, a young man nineteen years of age, over whose mind and senses she soon had a deplorable influence. When M. Langlais, who up till this time had shut his eyes, from good nature and kindly feeling towards his employee, saw his son in the hands, I might say in the arms, of this dangerous creature, he felt a well-justified resentment.

"He blundered in appealing immediately to Lougère and speaking to him in the heat of his paternal indignation.

"It only remains, gentlemen, for me to read you the account of the crime, as it came from the lips of a dying man and was recorded by the official.

"I had just learned that my son had only the day before given this woman ten thousand francs, and my anger mastered my reason. Of course, I had never doubted Lougère's integrity, but blindness is sometimes more dangerous than wrongdoing.

"I sent for him to come to me, and I told him that I should be obliged to dispense with his services.

“ ‘He stood there in front of me, bewildered, unable to understand. At last he demanded explanations with some vehemence.

“ ‘I refused to give him them, declaring that my reasons were of a quite intimate nature. Then he imagined that I suspected him of bad behaviour and, turning pale, he implored me, ordered me, to explain myself. Obsessed by this thought, he was insistent and he felt entitled to speak freely.

“ ‘When I kept silence, he abused and insulted me, and reached such a pitch of exasperation that I feared we should come to blows.

“ ‘Then, all at once, an offensive word struck me to the heart and I flung the truth in his teeth.

“ ‘For several moments he stood still, looking at me with haggard eyes ; then I saw him take from my desk the long scissors which I use to cut the margins of certain registers, then I saw him rush on me with his arm raised, and I felt something enter my throat just above my chest, without any sensation of pain.’

“ ‘There, gentlemen of the jury, you have the simple facts of this murder, which is all the defence he needs. He revered his second wife blindly, because he had justly revered the first.’

After a brief deliberation, the accused was acquitted.

MARTIN'S GIRL

IT HAPPENED TO HIM ONE SUNDAY AFTER MASS. HE CAME out of church and was following the sunken road that led to his house, when he found himself behind Martin's girl, who also was on her way home.

The head of the house marched beside his daughter with the consequential step of a prosperous farmer. Disdaining a smock, he wore a sort of jacket of grey cloth, and on his head a wide-brimmed felt-hat.

She, squeezed into stays that she only laced once a week, walked along stiffly, swinging her arms a little, her waist compressed, broad-shouldered, her hips swinging as she walked.

On her head she wore a flower-trimmed hat, the creation of an Yvetot milliner, that left bare all her strong, supple, rounded neck; short downy hairs, bleached by sun and open air, blew about it.

Benoist saw only her back, but her face was familiar enough to him, although he had never really looked at it.

"Dammit," he said abruptly, "she's a rare fine wench after all, is Martin's girl." He watched her walking along, filled with sudden admiration, his senses stirred. He had no need to see her face again. He kept his eyes fixed on her figure; one thought hammered in his mind, as if he had said it aloud: "Dammit, she's a rare fine wench."

Martin's girl turned to the right to enter Martin's Farm, the farm belonging to Jean Martin, her father; she turned round and looked behind her. She saw Benoist, whom she thought a very queer-looking fellow.

"Good morning, Benoist," she called.

"Good morning, lass; good morning, Martin," he answered, and walked on.

When he reached his own house, the soup was on the table. He sat down opposite his mother, beside the labourer and the boy, while the servant-girl went to draw the cider.

He ate some spoonfuls, then pushed away his plate.

"Are you sick?" his mother asked.

"No," he answered. "It feels like I had porridge in my stomach and it spoils my appetite."

He watched the others eating, every now and then breaking off a mouthful of bread that he carried slowly to his lips and chewed for a long time. He was thinking of Martin's girl: "She's a rare fine wench after all." And to think he had never noticed it until this moment, and that it had come upon him like this, out of a clear sky, and so desperately that he could not eat.

He hardly touched the stew. His mother said:

"Come, Benoist, make yourself eat a morsel; it's a bit of loin, it'll do you good. When you've no appetite, you ought to make yourself eat."

He swallowed a little, then pushed his plate aside again—no, it was no better.

When the meal was over, he went off round the fields, and gave the labourer the afternoon off, promising to look to the beasts on the way round.

The country-side was deserted, it being the day of rest. Dotted about a clover-field, the cows lay placidly, with swollen bellies, chewing the cud under the hot sun. Unyoked ploughs were waiting in the corner of a ploughed field; and the wide brown squares of upturned fields, ready for the sowing, stretched between patches of yellow covered with the rotting stubble of corn and oats recently gathered in.

An autumn wind, a dry wind, blew over the plain with

the promise of a fresh evening after sunset. Benoist sat down on the edge of a dike, rested his hat on his knees, as if he needed the air on his head, and declared aloud, in the silent country-side: "A fine girl that, a fine girl."

He was still thinking about her when night came, in his bed, and in the morning, when he woke.

He was not unhappy, he was not restless: he could hardly say what his feelings were. It was something that held him, something that had fastened on his imagination, an idea that obsessed him and roused something like a thrill in his heart. A big fly sometimes gets shut up in a room. You hear it fly round, buzzing, and the sound obsesses and irritates. Suddenly it stops: you forget it, but all at once it begins again, forcing you to raise your head. You can neither catch it nor chase it nor kill it nor make it keep still. It settles for a brief moment, and begins droning again.

The memory of Martin's girl flitted distractedly through Benoist's mind like an imprisoned fly.

Then he was seized with desire to see her again, and walked several times past Martin's Farm. At last he caught a glimpse of her, hanging washing on a line stretched between two apple-trees.

It was warm: she had taken off everything but a short petticoat and her chemise, which revealed the curve of her body when she lifted her arms to peg out the napkins.

He remained crouching under the dike for more than an hour, even after she had gone. He went away again with her image more firmly fixed in his mind than ever.

For a month his mind was filled with thoughts of her, he shivered when she was spoken of in his presence. He could not eat, and every night he sweated so that he could not sleep.

On Sunday at Mass, his eyes never left her. She noticed it, and smiled at him, flattered by his admiration.

One evening he came upon her unexpectedly in a road. She stopped when she saw him coming. Then he walked right up to her, choking with nervousness and a passion of desire, but determined to speak to her. He began, stuttering :

"Look here, my lass, this can't go on like this."

Her reply sounded as if she were making fun of him :

"What is it that can't go on, Benoist ?"

He answered :

"That I think about you as often as there are hours in the day."

She rested her hands on her hips :

"I'm not making you do it."

He stammered :

"Yes, you are : I can't sleep, or rest, or eat, or anything."

She said softly :

"Well, and what would cure you ?"

He stood paralysed, his arms dangling, his eyes round, his mouth hanging open.

She poked him in the stomach, and ran away.

After this day, they met again by the dikes, in the sunken roads, or more often at dusk on the edge of a field, when he was coming home with his goats and she was driving the cows back to their shed.

He felt himself urged, driven towards her by a wild desire of heart and body. He would have liked to crush her, strangle her, devour her, absorb her into himself. And he trembled with impotent, impatient rage because she was not his completely, as if they had been one and indivisible.

People were talking about them. They were said to be betrothed. In fact, he had asked her if she would be his wife, and she had answered him : "Yes."

They were waiting an opportunity to speak to their parents.

Then, without warning, she stopped coming to meet him at the usual hour. He did not even see her when he prowled round the farm. He could not catch a glimpse of her at Mass on Sundays. And then one Sunday, after the sermon, the priest announced in the pulpit that he published the banns of marriage between Victoire-Adélaïde Martin and Josephin-Isidore Vallin.

Benoist felt a strange emotion in his hands, as though the blood had run out of them. His ears sang; he heard nothing more, and after a time he realised that he was crying in his missal.

He kept his room for a month. Then he began working again.

But he was not cured, and he thought about it continually. He avoided walking along the roads that ran past the house where she lived, so that he should not see even the trees in the yard: it necessitated a wide detour, which he made morning and evening.

She had now married Vallin, the wealthiest farmer in the district. Benoist and he no longer spoke, although they had been friends since childhood.

One evening, as Benoist passed by through the village square, he heard that she was pregnant. Instead of bitter suffering, the knowledge brought him, on the contrary, something like relief. It was finished now, absolutely finished. This divided them more utterly than her marriage. He really preferred it so.

Months passed, and more months. He caught occasional glimpses of her going about the village with her burdened gait. She turned red when she saw him, hung her head and quickened her step. And he turned out of his way to avoid crossing her path and meeting her eye.

But he thought wretchedly that the day would inevitably come when he would find himself face to face with her, and

be compelled to speak to her. What should he say to her now, after all he had said to her in other days, holding her hands and kissing the hair which fell round her cheeks? He still thought often of their dike-side trysts. It was a wicked thing she had done, after all her promises.

Little by little, however, his heart forgot its pain; only a gentle melancholy lingered in it. And one day, for the first time, he took again his old road past the farm where she lived. He saw the roof of her house long before he drew near. It was under this very roof that she was living with another. The apple-trees were in bloom, the cocks crowing on the dunghill. There did not seem to be a soul in the house, since every one was in the fields, hard at work on the tasks spring brought. He halted near the fence and looked into the yard. The dog was asleep in front of his kennel, three calves were going slowly, one after another, towards the pond. A plump turkey was strutting before the door, showing off before the hens with the air of an operatic star.

Benoist leaned against the post: a sudden, violent desire to weep had seized him again. But all at once he heard a cry, a cry for help. It came from the house. He stood a moment bewildered, his hands gripping the wooden bar, listening, listening. Another cry, a long-drawn, agonised cry, thrust through his ears and mind and flesh. It was she crying like this. He leaped forward, crossed the grass, pushed open the door and saw her stretched on the floor, writhing, with livid and haggard eyes, taken by the pangs of childbirth.

He stood there, then, pale and more violently trembling than she, stammering:

"Here I am, here I am, my lass."

Gasping, she answered:

"Oh, don't leave me, don't leave me, Benoist."

He stared at her, not knowing what else to say or do. Her cries began again :

" Oh ! oh ! it tears me ! Oh ! Benoist ! "

And she twisted herself in an agony of pain.

All at once, Benoist was overwhelmed by a wild impulse to succour her, comfort her, take away her pain. He stooped, took her in his arms, lifted her up, carried her to her bed, and while she continued to moan, he undressed her, taking off her bodice, her skirt, her petticoat. She was gnawing her fists to keep from screaming. Then he did for her all he was used to do for beasts, for cows and sheep and mares : he helped her and received between his hands a plump, wailing child.

He washed it, wrapped it in a dish-cloth that was drying before the fire, and laid it on a pile of linen that was lying on the table to be ironed ; then he went back to the mother.

He laid her on the floor again, changed the bed, and put her back in it. She stammered : " Thanks, Benoist, you're a kind soul." And she wept a few tears, as if she were regretting things a little.

As for him, he felt no love for her now, none at all. It was over. Why ? How ? He could not have said. The events of the last hour had cured him more effectually than ten years' absence would have done.

Exhausting and fainting, she asked :

" What is it ? "

He answered calmly :

" It's a girl, and a very fine one."

They were silent again. A few moments later, the mother spoke in a weak voice :

" Show her to me, Benoist."

He went to bring the infant, and he was offering it to her as if he held the Holy Sacrament, when the door opened and Isidore Vallin appeared.

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At first he did not understand ; then, suddenly, realisation came to him.

Benoist, filled with dismay, stammered :

" I was going past, I was just going past, when I heard her screaming, and I came in . . . here's your baby, Vallin."

Tears in his eyes, the husband stooped towards him and took the tiny morsel the other held out to him, kissed it ; a moment he stood, his emotion choking him ; he laid his child back on the bed and, holding out both hands to Benoist :

" Put it there, Benoist, put it there : there's nothing more for you and me to say now. We'll be friends if you're willing ; eh, friends ! "

And Benoist answered :

" I'm willing, I am ; of course I'm willing."

ONE NIGHT'S ENTERTAINMENT

SERGEANT-MAJOR VARAJOU HAD GOT A WEEK'S LEAVE TO visit his sister, Mme Padoie. Varajou, who was garrisoned at Rennes, and led a gay life there, finding himself penniless and in disgrace with his family, had written to his sister that he would be able to devote a week's freedom to her. Not that he was very fond of Mme Padoie, a sententious little woman, pious and always ill-tempered, but he needed money, he needed it badly, and he remembered that the Padoies were the only remaining relatives on whom he had not levied toll.

Varajou senior, formerly a horticulturist at Angers, had retired from business, had shut his purse to his scapegrace of a son, and had hardly set eyes on him for two years. His daughter had married Padoie, formerly a bank clerk, who had just been made a tax-collector at Vannes.

So Varajou betook himself by train to his brother-in-law's house; he found him in his office, in the thick of a discussion with some Breton peasants from the neighbouring village. Padoie rose from his chair, held out a hand across the papers piled on his table, and murmured:

"Take a seat, I'll be ready to talk to you in a minute." He then sat down again, and went on with his discussion.

The peasants did not understand his explanations, he did not understand their arguments; he spoke French, the others spoke a Breton dialect, and the clerk who was acting as interpreter did not seem to understand either party.

For a long time Varajou sat contemplating his brother-in-law, and thinking: "What an impossible ass!"

Padoie must have been nearly fifty years old ; he was tall, thin, bony, slow and shaggy, with overarching eyebrows that formed hairy vaults over his eyes. His head was covered with a velvet cap, ornamented with a golden tassel ; his glance was mild, as were all his characteristics ; he was mild in word, deed and thought. Varajou silently reiterated : " What an impossible ass ! "

He himself was one of your noisy roisterers, for whom life holds no greater pleasures than wine and bought women. Outside these two poles of existence, he understood nothing. Braggart, brawler, contemptuous of every living person, he despised the whole world from the heights of his ignorance. When he said : " Damn it, what a lark," he had certainly expressed the highest degree of admiration of which he was capable.

At last Padoie dismissed the peasants, and asked :

" You going on all right ? "

" Not bad, as you can see. What about you ? "

" Fairly well, thanks. It's very nice of you to think of coming to see us."

" Oh, I've been thinking of coming to see you for a long time, but in the military profession one's not so free, you know."

" Oh, I know, I know. Never mind, it's very nice of you."

" And is Josephine well ? "

" Yes, yes, thanks, you'll see her in a moment."

" Where is she now, then ? "

" She's out visiting ; we have a lot of acquaintances here ; it's a very select town."

" I'm sure it is."

But the door opened, Mme Padoie appeared. She approached her brother with no great show of joy, offered him her cheek, and said : " Have you been here long ? "

" No, hardly half an hour."

"Ah, I thought the train would be late. Come into the drawing-room, will you?"

As soon as they were alone: "I've been hearing fine tales about you."

"What have you heard?"

"It seems that you behave in the most disgraceful ways, that you drink and run up bills."

He wore an air of profound astonishment.

"Never in my life."

"Oh, don't deny it, I know better."

He made another attempt to defend himself, but she silenced him with so violent a scolding that he was compelled to hold his tongue. Then she added:

"We dine at six, you're free till dinner, I can't keep you company because I've several things to do."

Left to himself, he hesitated between sleeping and going out. He gazed in turn at the door leading to his room, and the one which led to the street. He decided on the street.

So he went out, and sauntered slowly, his sword clanking on his legs, through the dreary Breton town, so sleepy, so dead-alive beside its inland sea, the "Morbihan." He looked at the little grey houses, the rare passers-by, the empty shops, and murmured: "What a deadly dull place, Vannes; it was a rotten idea to come here."

He reached the gloomy harbour, returned along a sad, deserted boulevard, and was home again before five o'clock. Then he flung himself upon his bed to sleep till dinner time.

The maid woke him by knocking on his door.

"Dinner is ready, sir."

He went down.

In the damp dining-room, where the paper was peeling off the lower half of the walls, a soup-tureen waited on a round bare table in company with three melancholy plates.

M. and Mme Padoie entered just as Varajou did.

They took their places, then husband and wife made a sign of the cross on the pit of their stomachs, after which Padoie served the soup, thick soup. It was broth day.

After the soup, came the beef, overdone, disintegrated, greasy beef, cooked to a mush. The sergeant-major masticated it slowly, overcome with disgust, weariness and anger.

Mme Padoie was saying to her husband :

" You're going to visit the President to-night ? "

" Yes, my dear."

" Don't stay too late. You get tired every time you go out anywhere ; you ought not to go out with your bad health."

Then she began to talk about the society of Vannes, of the very select society which received the Padoies with the greatest respect, because of their religious beliefs.

Then mashed potatoes, with slices of cold sausage, were served, in honour of the guest. Then cheese. The meal was finished. No coffee.

Varajou realised that he would have to spend the evening alone with his sister, enduring her reproaches and listening to her sermons, without even a liqueur to pour down his throat to make her reprimands easier to swallow ; he thought desperately that he could not endure such anguish, and declared that he had to report at the police station to get his leave papers made properly in order. And he hurried away at seven o'clock.

The instant he got into the street, he began by shaking himself like a dog coming out of the water. " My God," he murmured, " oh, my God, what a filthy bore ! "

He set out in search of a café, the best café in the town. He found it in a square, behind two gas-jets. Inside, five or six men, quiet, prosperous tradespeople, were sitting with their elbows on the little tables, drinking and talking quietly,

while two billiard-players walked round the green cloth, where their balls rolled and collided.

Voices rose, announcing the score. "Eighteen. Nineteen. No luck. Oh, good stroke; well played. Eleven. You ought to have taken it off the red. Twenty. Run through, run through. Twelve. Then I was right, wasn't I?"

Varajou ordered: "Coffee, and a decanter of brandy, the best."

Then he sat down, and waited for his drinks.

He was accustomed to spending his evenings of freedom with his comrades, in rowdy hilarity and clouds of smoke. The silence and calm of this place exasperated him. He began to drink, first coffee, and then the decanter of brandy, then a second which he had ordered. He was ready to laugh now, shout, sing, fight someone.

"Thank the Lord," he said, "Varajou's himself again." Then the idea came into his head to find some women for his amusement. He called for a waiter:

"Hi, my lad."

"Yes, sir."

"My lad, whereabouts in this town can a fellow see a bit of fun?"

The man looked blank at the question.

"I don't know, sir. At this café."

"What do you mean, in this café? What do you call a bit of fun, eh?"

"Why, I don't know, sir; drinking a glass of good beer or wine."

"Come off it, idiot. Women, what do you do for women?"

"Women! Ah!"

"Yes, women. Where'll I get any here?"

"Women?"

"Yes, of course, women."

The waiter came closer, and lowered his voice :

" You want to know where the house is ? "

" Why, yes. "

" Take the second street to the left, and the first to the right. Number 15. "

" Thanks, old bean. Here y're. "

" Thank you, sir. "

And Varajou left the café repeating : " Second to the left, first to the right, 15. " But after walking for a few moments, he thought : " Second to the left—yes—— But ought I to turn right or left from the café ? Bah, devil take it, I'll soon find out. "

He walked on, turned down the second street to the left, then down the first on the right, and looked for Number 15. It was a fairly substantial house, and he could see that the first-floor windows were lit up behind their closed shutters. The front door was half open, and a lamp was burning in the hall. The sergeant-major thought : " This is it. "

So he went in, and, as no one came, he called :

" Hullo, hullo. "

A little maid came, and stood stock-still in amazement at the sight of a soldier. " Good evening, my child, " he said to her. " Are the ladies upstairs ? "

" Yes, sir. "

" In the drawing-room ? "

" Yes, sir. "

" I can go up, I suppose, can I ? "

" Yes, sir. "

" The door is at the top of the stairs ? "

" Yes, sir. "

He went upstairs, opened a door, and in a room brilliantly lighted by two lamps, a lustre, and two candelabras of wax-candles, he saw four ladies in evening-gowns who seemed to be expecting somebody.

The three youngest were arranged rather stiffly on chairs covered in garnet velvet, while the fourth, who was about forty-five years old, was arranging some flowers in a vase. She was very fat, and clad in a green silk dress that, like a sheath of a monstrous flower, revealed her enormous arms, and her enormous throat, shining rose-red under a coating of powder.

The sergeant-major saluted :

" Good evening, ladies."

The old lady turned round ; she seemed surprised, but she bowed :

" Good evening."

He sat down.

But perceiving that they showed no signs of being delighted to welcome him, he thought that probably only officers were admitted to this place ; the thought disturbed him. Then he said to himself : " Bah, if an officer comes, we'll pull it off." And he asked :

" Everything all right ? "

The stout lady, who was doubtless the mistress of the house, replied :

" Quite all right, thank you."

He found no more to say and no one else spoke.

At last he became ashamed of his diffidence and, laughing awkwardly, said :

" Well, we're not having a very riotous time. I'll pay for a bottle of wine. . . ."

He had not finished his remark when the door opened again, and Padoie appeared in evening-dress.

At the sight of him, Varajou gave vent to a howl of delight, and jumping to his feet, he leapt on his brother-in-law, seized him in his arms, and danced him round the drawing-room, bawling : " Here's old Padoie . . . here's old Padoie . . . here's old Padoie."

Then, leaving the collector dazed with surprise, he shouted in his face :

" Oh, you gay dog, you gay dog ! . . . So you're having a night out . . . oh, you gay dog ! What about my sister ! You're giving her the go-by, are you ? "

And seeing in a flash all the profitable consequences of this unhopèd-for situation, forced loans and absolutely safe blackmail, he flung himself full length on the couch and began to laugh so madly that the whole couch creaked.

The three young ladies rose as one, and hurried out, while the elder lady recoiled towards the door, and seemed on the verge of fainting.

Two gentlemen appeared, both in evening-dress, and wearing their orders. Padoie flung himself towards them.

" Oh, Mr. President . . . he's mad . . . mad. . . . He's been sent to us to recuperate . . . you can see for yourself that he's mad."

Varajou gave it up : he didn't understand things now, and abruptly guessed that he had made some quite monstrous lapse. Then he stood up, and turned towards his brother-in-law :

" What's this house, where are we ? " he asked.

But Padoie, seized with a sudden access of fury, stammered :

" Where are we ? . . . where are we ? . . . Wretch . . . miscreant . . . scoundrel . . . where are we ? . . . in the President's house . . . in the house of President de Mortemain . . . de Mortemain . . . de . . . de . . . de Mortemain . . . oh . . . oh . . . swine ! . . . swine ! . . . swine ! . . . swine ! "

THE CONFESSION

WHEN CAPTAIN HECTOR-MARIE DE FONTENNE MARRIED Mlle Laurine d'Estelle, parents and friends were of the opinion that it was a most unsuitable match.

Mlle Laurine, pretty, slender, fragile, fair and self-possessed, had at twelve the assurance of a woman of thirty. She was one of those precocious little Parisians who seem to have been born with a perfect understanding of the art of life, equipped with every feminine wile, every intellectual audacity, and with the profound guile and subtlety of mind that makes certain men and women seem fated, however they may act, to trick and deceive others. Their every action seems premeditated, their every move calculated, their every word carefully weighed ; their existence is only a part that they play to an audience of their fellow-creatures.

She was charming too : bubbling with laughter, laughter that she could neither restrain nor moderate when she came across anything amusing or odd. She laughed in people's faces in the most impudent way in the world, but so charmingly that no one was ever offended.

She was rich, extremely rich. A priest acted as intermediary to arrange her marriage with Captain de Fontenne. Educated in a seminary, in the most austere fashion, this officer had brought to the regiment the manners of the cloister, the strictest principles and an armour-plated intolerance. He was one of those men who become by an inevitable fate either saints or nihilists, over whose minds ideas exercise an absolute tyranny, whose beliefs are never shaken nor their resolutions broken.

He was a tall, dark youth, grave, austere, ingenuous, single-minded, curt and obstinate, one of those men who go through life with not the least understanding of its hidden meanings, its half-tones and its subtleties, guessing nothing, suspecting nothing, never admitting that anyone thinks, judges, believes or acts otherwise than they do themselves.

Mlle Laurine saw him, read his character at a glance, and agreed to take him for her husband.

They got on splendidly together. She was tactful, quick-witted and subtle, able to adapt herself to any rôle demanded of her, diligent in good works and ardent in pleasure, assiduous in her attendance at church and theatre, urbane and correct, with a delicate suggestion of irony and a gleam that lurked in her eye as she conversed gravely with her grave husband. She related to him the charitable enterprises she undertook with all the priests of the parish and the neighbourhood, and these pious occupations provided her with an excuse for staying out from morning till night.

But sometimes, in the very middle of reciting some charitable deed, she fell abruptly into a wild fit of laughter, nervous and quite irrepressible. Captain de Fontenne was surprised, uneasy and a little shocked by the spectacle of his wife choking with mirth. When she was recovering her self-control he would ask: "Well, what is it, Laurine?" "It's nothing," she answered: "I just thought of an odd thing that happened to me." And she would proceed to tell him some tale or other.

Well, during the summer of 1883, Captain Hector de Fontenne took part in the grand manœuvres of the 32nd Army Corps.

One evening, when they were camping in the outskirts of a town, after ten days of living under canvas and in the

open country, ten days of hard work and rough living, the captain's comrades determined to stand themselves a good dinner.

At first M. de Fontenne refused to accompany them; then, as his refusal caused surprise, he agreed.

His neighbour at table, Major de Faure, under cover of talking about military operations, the only thing in which Captain de Fontenne was really interested, filled his glass again and again. The day had been very warm, with a heavy, scorching, thirsty heat; and Captain de Fontenne went on drinking without thinking what he did: he did not notice that, little by little, an unwonted gaiety was taking possession of him, a sharp, heady excitement. He was glad to be alive, full of wakening desires, new appetites, vague longings.

When dessert came, he was drunk. He talked, laughed, gesticulated, completely and clamorously drunk, with the mad drunkenness of your habitually quiet and abstemious man.

Someone proposed to finish the evening at the theatre: he accompanied his comrades. One of them recognised an actress whose lover he had been; and a supper party was arranged, that included part of the feminine personnel of the company.

Captain de Fontenne woke up next morning in a strange bedroom and in the arms of a little, fair-haired woman, who greeted him with: "Good morning, dearie," when she saw him opening his eyes.

At first he did not realise what had happened; then, slowly, things came back to him—a little confusedly, however.

Then he got up without saying a word, dressed, and emptied his purse on the mantelpiece.

He was overwhelmed with shame at the vision of himself

standing, in uniform, sword at his side, in this apartment room, with its shabby curtains and a stain-mottled couch of dubious aspect : he dared not go away, nor walk down the staircase where he would meet people, nor pass the concierge, and above all he dared not walk out into the street under the eyes of passers-by and neighbours.

The woman ran on : " What's the matter with you ? Have you lost your tongue ? You wagged it freely enough last night. You are a freak, you are ! "

He saluted her ceremoniously, and summoning up courage to get away, he strode back to his lodging, convinced that every one knew by his manner, his bearing and his face that he was coming from a prostitute.

And he was torn by remorse, the torturing remorse of an austere and scrupulous man.

He confessed and took the Sacrament ; but he was still sick at heart, obsessed by the remembrance of his fall and a feeling that he owed a debt, a sacred debt, to his wife.

He did not see her until a month later, for she had been staying with her parents, while the grand manœuvres took place.

She came to him with open arms and a smile on her lips. He received her with an embarrassed, guilty air, and hardly spoke to her until the evening.

As soon as they were alone together, she asked him :

" Well, what's the matter, darling ? I find you very changed."

He answered awkwardly :

" There's nothing the matter with me, my dear, absolutely nothing."

" I beg your pardon, but I know you very well, and I'm sure there's something the matter with you, some trouble or grief or annoyance or other."

"Well, yes, I am troubled."

"Ah! And by what?"

"I can't possibly tell you."

"Not tell me? Why not? You alarm me."

"I have no reason to give you. I can't possibly tell you about it."

She was sitting on a low couch and he was striding up and down the room, hands behind his back, avoiding his wife's eye. She went on:

"Very well, so I must hear your confession—that's my duty—and require the truth from you—that's my right. You can no more have secrets from me than I can have them from you."

He turned his back on her and stood framed in the tall window.

"My dear," he said solemnly, "there are things it is better not to tell. The thing that worries me is one of them."

She rose, crossed the room, took him by the arm and forced him to turn round. She put her two hands on his shoulders; then, smiling, coaxing, her eyes lifted to him, she said:

"Come, Marie" (she called him Marie when she loved him very much), "you can't hide anything from me. I believe you've done something wicked."

He murmured:

"I've done something very wicked."

"Oh, as bad as that?" she said gaily. "You of all people! You astonish me."

"I won't tell you anything more," he answered sharply. "It's no use your insisting."

But she led him to an arm-chair, made him sit in it, rested herself on his right knee and dropped a small swift kiss, a light-winged kiss, on the upturned end of his moustache.

"If you don't tell me, we shall never be friends again."

Torn by remorse and in an agony of grief, he murmured :

"If I told you what I had done, you would never forgive me."

"On the contrary, darling, I shall forgive you at once."

"No, it's impossible."

"I promise I will."

"I tell you it's impossible."

"I swear I'll forgive you."

"No, my dear Laurine, you couldn't."

"How childish you are, darling, not to say silly. By refusing to tell me what you've done, you leave me to believe abominable things ; and I shall always be thinking about it, and I shall bear you as deep a grudge for your silence as for your unknown crime. While if you tell me about it quite frankly, I shall have forgotten it to-morrow."

"Well, I. . . ."

"What ?"

He crimsoned to the ears, and said gravely :

"I confess to you as I would confess to a priest, Laurine."

Her lips curved in the swift smile that sometimes hovered there, as she listened to him ; in a half-mocking voice she said :

"I am all ears."

He went on :

"You know, my dear, how little I ever drink. I never drink anything but water with a dash of light wine, and never liqueurs, as you know."

"Yes, I know."

"Well, do you know, towards the end of the grand manœuvres, I allowed myself to drink a little one evening when I was very thirsty, very exhausted, very tired, and. . . ."

"You got drunk ? How horrid of you !"

"Yes, I got drunk."

She had adopted an air of severity :

"There now, you were quite drunk, own up, too drunk to walk, weren't you?"

"No, not so drunk as that. I lost my senses, not my balance. I talked and laughed, I was mad."

As he was silent, she asked :

"Is that all?"

"No."

"Ah! and . . . then?"

"Then . . . I . . . I did a very shameful thing."

She looked at him, uneasy, a little troubled and moved, too.

"What did you do, darling?"

"We had supper with . . . with some actresses . . . and I don't know how it happened, I've been unfaithful to you, Laurine."

He had made his confession in a grave solemn voice.

She started slightly, and her eyes gleamed with swift amusement, an overwhelming and irresistible amusement.

She said :

"You . . . you . . . you have. . . ."

A little, mirthless laugh, nervous and broken, escaped between her lips three times, choking her speech.

She tried to recover her gravity; but each time she opened her mouth to utter a word, laughter bubbled at the bottom of her throat, leaped forth, was stifled, and broke out again and again, like the gas of an uncorked bottle of champagne from which the froth is pouring. She pressed her hand on her lips to calm herself and to stifle this misplaced outburst of amusement in her mouth; but her laughter slipped between her fingers, came in choking gasps from her breast, escaped in spite of her. She babbled, "You . . . you . . . you have deceived me. . . . Oh! . . . oh! Oh! oh! . . . Oh! oh! oh!"

And she gazed at him with a strange expression that she could not keep from being so mocking that he was thunder-struck and stupefied.

And abruptly she gave up her attempt at self-control and broke down completely. Then she began to laugh, and laughed like a woman with an attack of nerves. Little, sharp, broken cries came between her lips, sounding as though they came from the very depths of her breast; with both hands pressed on the pit of her stomach, she abandoned herself to long-drawn spasms of laughter that almost choked her, like the spasms of coughing in whooping-cough.

And every effort she made to control herself brought on a fresh attack, every word she tried to say convulsed her the more.

"My . . . my . . . my . . . my poor darling . . . oh ! oh ! oh ! . . . oh ! oh ! oh ! . . ."

He stood up, leaving her sitting alone in the arm-chair ; he had suddenly turned pale and he said :

"Laurine, you are worse than vulgar."

In an ecstasy of amusement, she stammered :

"Well . . . well, what do you expect ? . . . I . . . I . . . I can't help it . . . you're so funny . . . oh ! oh ! oh ! oh !"

He had grown livid and he was looking at her now with a steady glance that revealed the strange thoughts stirring behind it.

Suddenly he opened his mouth as if to shout something, but said nothing, turned on his heel and went out, slamming the door.

Laurine, bent double, exhausted, faint, continued to laugh, in dying spasms of laughter that rose and fell like the flame of a half-extinguished blaze.

DIVORCE

MAÎTRE BONTRAN, THE CELEBRATED PARISIAN LAWYER, WHO for ten years had pleaded and won all divorce actions brought by ill-assorted couples, opened the door of his consulting-room and drew back to admit the new client.

He was a stout, red-faced man with thick, fair whiskers ; corpulent, full-blooded and vigorous. He bowed.

" Please be seated," said the lawyer.

The client sat down, coughed and said :

" I have come to ask you, sir, to act for me in a divorce case."

" Go on, I am listening."

" I am a retired lawyer."

" Already ? "

" Yes, already. I am thirty-seven years old."

" Go on."

" I have made an unfortunate marriage, very unfortunate."

" You are not the only one."

" I know it, and I sympathise with the others, but my case is quite unique, and my complaints against my wife are of a very peculiar nature. But I will begin at the beginning. I married in a very strange way. Do you believe in dangerous ideas ? "

" What do you mean by that ? "

" Do you believe that certain ideas may be as dangerous for certain minds as poison for the body ? "

" Well, yes, perhaps."

" I am sure of it. There are ideas that enter into us, gnaw us, kill us, madden us, if we are unable to resist them.

It's a sort of spiritual phylloxera. If we are unfortunate enough to let one of these thoughts creep into our minds, if we don't in the instant of its entry realise that it is an invader, a master, a tyrant, that hour by hour and day by day it takes firmer hold on us, returns again and again, roots itself in, drives out all our usual preoccupations, absorbs all our attention and changes the angle of our judgment, we are lost.

"Listen to what has happened to me. As I have told you, I was a notary in Rouen, and in rather tight circumstances, not poor, but pinched for money, always careful, forced to economise the whole time, obliged to limit all my desires, yes, all ! and that's hard at my age.

"In my capacity as a notary, I used to read with great care the announcements on the fourth page of the newspaper, the Offered and Wanted columns, the personal columns, etc., etc. ; and it often happened that I was enabled by these means to arrange advantageous marriages for some clients.

"One day I came across this one :

" ' Young lady, pretty, well educated, of good birth, with a dowry of two and a half million francs, wishes to marry an honourable man. No agents. '

"Well, that very day I dined with two of my friends, a solicitor and a mill-owner. I don't know how the conversation came to turn on marriages, and I told them, laughing, about the young lady with two and a half million francs.

" ' What sort of women are these women ? ' the mill-owner said.

"The solicitor had seen several excellent marriages made in this way and he gave details ; then he added, turning towards me :

" ' Why the devil don't you look into that on your own

behalf? Lord! two and a half million francs would make things easy for you!’

“We all three of us burst out laughing, and the talk turned on another subject.

“An hour later I went home.

“It was a cold night. I lived, besides, in an old house, one of those old provincial houses that are like mushroom beds. When I put my hand on the iron railing of the staircase, a cold shiver ran down my arm; I stretched out the other to find the wall and when I touched it, I felt another shiver strike through me, a shiver of damp this time; they met in my chest, and filled me with anguish, sadness and utter weariness of mind and body. A sudden memory woke in my mind and I murmured:

“‘God, if only I had two and a half million francs!’

“My bedroom was dismal, a Rouen bachelor’s bedroom, looked after by a servant who was cook as well as chambermaid. You can just imagine what it was like! a big, curtainless bed, a wardrobe, a chest of drawers, washstand, no fire. Clothes on the chairs, papers on the floor. I began to hum, to a music-hall tune—for I sometimes went to such places:

“One could play pretty pranks
With two million francs
And a half-million more
And a wife you adore.

“To tell the truth, I hadn’t thought of the woman before, and I thought of her suddenly as I was creeping into my bed. I even thought of her so earnestly that I was a long time falling asleep.

“When I opened my eyes next morning, before it was light, I recollected that I had to be at Darnétal at eight

o'clock on important business. So I would have to get up at six—and it was freezing.

“ ‘ Christ, two and a half millions ! ’ ”

“ I returned to my office about ten o'clock. It was full of a smell of rusty stove, old papers about long drawn-out lawsuits—nothing stinks as they do—and a smell of clerks, boots, frock-coats, shirts, hair and bodies, ill-washed, winter-bound bodies, all heated to a temperature of sixty-five degrees.

“ I ate my usual lunch, a burnt cutlet and a morsel of cheese. Then I set to work again.

“ It was then that for the first time I thought really seriously of the young lady with two and a half millions. Who was she? Why should I not write? Why not find out about it?

“ Well, to cut a long story short: for a fortnight the idea haunted, obsessed, tortured me. All my annoyances, all the little miseries I constantly suffered, until then unconsciously, almost without realising them, pricked me now like the stabbing of needles, and every one of these little sufferings made my thoughts leap to the young lady with two and a half millions.

“ I began at last to imagine the story of her life. When you want a thing to be, you think of it as being just what you wish it were.

“ Of course, it was not very usual for a young girl of good family, possessed of so attractive a dowry, to seek a husband by way of a newspaper advertisement. However, this particular girl might be honourable and unfortunate.

“ From the first, this fortune of two and a half million francs had not dazzled me by any sense of fabulous wealth. We are used, we people who are always reading offers of this kind, to matrimonial propositions accompanied by six, eight, ten or even twelve millions. The twelve-million figure

is even quite common. It attracts. I'm quite aware that we hardly credit the reality of these promises. But they do accustom our minds to the contemplation of these fantastic figures; to a certain extent they do induce our nodding credulity to accept as reasonable the prodigious sums of money they represent, and lead us to consider a dowry of two and a half million francs as very possible and probable.

"Suppose a young lady, the illegitimate daughter of a parvenu and a lady's maid, inheriting unexpectedly from the father, had learned at the same time the disgrace of her birth, and to avoid revealing it to any man who might fall in love with her, was trying to get into touch with strangers by a very customary medium, which did in itself imply almost a confession of dubious antecedents.

"My supposition was a stupid one. But I clung to it. Men of my profession, notaries, ought never to read novels—and I have read them.

"So I wrote in my professional capacity in the name of a client, and I waited.

"Five days later, about three o'clock in the afternoon, I was working hard in my office when the head clerk announced:

" 'Mlle Chantefrise.'

" 'Ask her to come in.'

"Thereupon a woman of about thirty appeared, rather stout, dark, and with an embarrassed air.

" 'Please sit down, Madame.'

"She sat down and murmured:

" 'I've come, sir.'

" 'But, Madame, I haven't the honour to know you.'

" 'I'm the person you wrote to.'

" 'About a marriage?'

" 'Yes.'

" 'Ah, just so.'

“ ‘I have come myself, because these things are best arranged personally.’

“ ‘I agree with you, Madame. So you wish to marry?’

“ ‘Yes.’

“ ‘You have parents?’

“ She hesitated, lowered her glance, and stammered :

“ ‘No. . . . My mother . . . and my father . . . are dead.’

“ I started. So I had guessed right . . . and a sudden swift sympathy woke in my heart for this poor creature. I did not insist, in order to spare her sensitiveness, and I went on :

“ ‘Your fortune is quite unencumbered?’

“ This time she answered without hesitating :

“ ‘Yes.’

“ I regarded her attentively, and honestly she didn’t displease me, although she was a little mature, more mature than I had expected. She was a fine, healthy woman, a superior woman. And I took it into my head that I might play a charming little comedy of sentiment, fall in love with her, and supplant my imaginary client, when I had made sure that the dowry was not fictitious. I talked to her about this client, whom I depicted as a grave, very honourable man, and something of an invalid.

“ ‘Oh,’ she said quickly, ‘I like people who are really strong and healthy.’

“ You shall see him, however, Madame, but not for three or four days, for he went to England yesterday.’

“ ‘Oh ! how vexing !’ said she.

“ ‘Well, it is and it isn’t. Are you in a hurry to return home?’

“ ‘Not at all.’

“ ‘Well, stay here. I will give myself the pleasure of helping you to pass the time.’

" ' You are too kind. '

" ' You are staying in a hotel ? '

" She mentioned the best hotel in Rouen.

" ' Well, Madame, will you allow your future . . . notary to take you to dine this evening ? '

" She seemed to hesitate, uneasy and irresolute ; then she made up her mind.

" ' Yes. '

" And I escorted her to the door.

" At seven o'clock I was at the hotel. She had made an elaborate toilet for me and received me in a very coquettish fashion.

" I took her to dine in a restaurant where I was known, and I ordered a stimulating meal.

" Within an hour we were very friendly, and she was telling me her story. She was the daughter of a great lady who had been seduced by a nobleman, and had been brought up by some country people. She was rich now, having inherited large sums from her father and her mother, whose names she would never tell, never. It was no use asking her for them, no use begging her, she would not give them. As I was not much concerned to know them, I questioned her about her fortune. She spoke of it readily and like a practical woman, quite sure of herself, sure of figures, securities, income, dividends and investments. The competent way she dealt with this made me feel great confidence in her at once, and I made myself very agreeable to her, with a certain amount of reserve, however, but I let her see quite plainly that I was attracted by her.

" She began to give herself airs, and they didn't become her badly, either. I pressed her to have champagne, and I drank some myself, and it went to my head a little. I saw very plainly that I was going to become rash, and I was afraid, afraid of myself, afraid of her, afraid that she, too,

was a little excited and might yield. To steady myself, I began to talk to her about her dowry again, which must be verified beyond any possibility of mistake, for my client was a business man.

"She answered gaily :

" ' Oh, I know. I have brought all the proofs. '

" ' Here, to Rouen ? '

" ' Yes, to Rouen. '

" ' You have them at the hotel ? '

" ' Of course. '

" ' Can you show them to me ? '

" ' Of course. '

" ' This evening ? '

" ' Of course. '

"This was a complete relief to me. I settled the bill, and off we went to her hotel.

"She had, as she said, brought all her securities. I could not doubt their existence, I held them, fingered them, read them. This filled me with such heartfelt joy that I was immediately seized with a violent desire to embrace her. I mean, with a chaste desire, the desire of a satisfied man. And upon my word, I embraced her. Once, twice, ten times . . . so heartily that—the champagne helping—I succumbed . . . or rather . . . no . . . she succumbed.

"Oh, I made a rare scene about it, after that . . . and so did she. She wept like a fountain, and begged me not to betray her, not to ruin her. I promised everything she wanted, and I went away in a dreadful state of mind.

"What was I to do? I had outraged my client. That would not have mattered at all if I had had a client for her, but I hadn't one. I was the client, the simple-minded client, the deceived client, deceived by myself. What a situation! I could leave her in the lurch, of course. But the dowry, actual, certain! Besides, had I the right to leave her in the

lurch, poor girl, after having taken advantage of her like that? But what anxieties I should be laying up for myself!

"What security could I feel with a wife who succumbed so easily!

"I spent a dreadful night, unable to make up my mind, tortured with remorse, harried by fears, torn this way and that by every kind of scruple. But in the morning my brain cleared. I dressed myself carefully, and as eleven o'clock was striking, I presented myself at the hotel where she was staying.

"When she saw me, she blushed to the roots of her hair.

"I said:

"'Madame, there is only one thing I can do to repay you the wrong I have done you. I ask you to marry me.'

"She stammered:

"'I consent.'

"I married her.

"For six months all went well.

"I had given up my office, I was living on my income, and really, I had nothing, not a single thing, to reproach my wife with.

"However, I began to notice that every now and then she went out and stayed out for an appreciable time. This happened at regular times, one week on Tuesday, another week on Friday. I was sure she was deceiving me, and I followed her.

"It was a Tuesday. She set out on foot, about one o'clock, walked down the Rue de la République, turned to the right down the street that runs from the Archbishop's Palace, took the Rue Grand-Pont as far as the Seine, went along the quay as far as the Pierre bridge and crossed the water. At this point, she seemed uneasy; she kept turning round to scrutinise all the passers-by.

"As I had got myself up to look like a coal-heaver, she did not recognise me.

"At last she went into the station on the left side of the river : I had no further doubts, her lover was coming on the 1.45 train.

"I hid myself behind a dray, and waited. A whistle . . . a rush of passengers. . . . She walked towards them, then ran forward, clasped in her arms a little three-year-old girl accompanied by a stout peasant woman, and kissed her passionately. Then she turned round, saw another younger child, a girl or a boy, carried by another countrywoman, threw herself on him, embraced him wildly and went off, escorted by the two mites and their two nurses, towards the long, dreary, deserted promenade of Cours-la-Reine.

"I returned home, bewildered and in great distress of mind, half understanding and half not, and not daring to hazard a guess.

"When she came home to dinner, I rushed at her :

" ' Who are those children ? ' "

" ' What children ? ' "

" ' The children you met on the train from Saint-Sever. ' "

"She gave a great cry and fainted. When she recovered consciousness, she confessed to me, in a flood of tears, that she had four. Yes, sir, two for the Tuesday, two girls, and two for the Friday, two boys.

"And that . . . oh, the shame of it ! . . . that was the origin of the fortune. The four fathers ! . . . She had gathered together her dowry.

"Now, sir, what do you advise me to do ? "

The lawyer replied gravely :

"Acknowledge your children, sir."



THE REVENGE

SCENE I

M. de Garelle, alone, lying back in an arm-chair.

HERE I AM AT CANNES, A GAY BACHELOR, WHICH IS humorous enough. I'm a bachelor. At Paris I hardly realised it. Away from home, it's another thing. Upon my word, I'm not complaining about it.

And my wife is married again!

I wonder if my successor is happy, happier than I. What a fool must he be to have married her after me! For the matter of that, I was no less a fool for marrying her first. She had her points, however, certain good points . . . physical ones . . . quite remarkably good, but she had serious moral blemishes too.

What a slut, what a liar, what a flirt she was, and how attractive to men who were not her husband! Was I a cuckold? God, it's sheer torture to be wondering that from morning to evening, and never to know for sure.

What plots and counter-plots I laid to watch her, and was never any the wiser! In any case, if I was a cuckold, I'm one no longer, thanks to Naquet. How easy divorce is after all! It cost me ten francs for a riding-whip, and a stiffness in my right arm, not counting the pleasure it gave me to lay on to my heart's content on a woman whom I strongly suspect of deceiving me.

What a thrashing, what a thrashing I gave her! . . .

He stands up, laughing, takes a few steps, and sits down again.

True, the verdict was given in her favour and against me . . . but what a thrashing !

Now I am spending the winter in the South, a gay bachelor. What luck ! It's delightful to travel when you can always hope to meet a new love round every corner. Whom shall I meet, in this hotel, now, or on the Croisette, or perhaps in the street ? Where is she, the woman who will love me to-morrow, whose lover I shall be ? What will her eyes be like, her lips, her hair, her smile ? What will she be like, the first woman who will give me her mouth and be folded in my arms ? Dark or fair ? Tall or short ? Gay or grave ? Plump or . . . ' She will be plump !

Oh ! how I pity people who don't know, people who no longer know the exquisite pleasure of anticipation ! The woman I really love is the Unknown, the Hoped-for, the Desired, she who haunts my heart, whom my eyes have never seen in the flesh, she whose charms are augmented by every ideal perfection. Where is she ? In this hotel, behind this door ? In one of the rooms of this house, quite near, or still far away ? What matter, so long as I desire her, so long as I am certain of meeting her ! And I shall assuredly meet her, to-day or to-morrow, this week or next, sooner or later ; it is absolutely inevitable that I shall find her.

And I shall have, in all their charm, the divine joy of the first kiss, the first caresses, all the maddening ecstasy of lovers' discoveries, all the mystery of the unexplored, as desirable the first day as a conquered maidenhood. Oh ! the fools who do not understand the adorable sensation of veils raised for the first time ! Oh, the fools who marry . . . since . . . the said veils . . . ought not to be raised too often . . . on the same sight ! . . .

Here comes a woman.

A woman crosses the far end of the corridor, elegant, slender, with a tapering waist.

Damn her, she has a figure, and an air. Let's try to catch sight of . . . her face.

She passes near him without seeing him, buried in the depths of the arm-chair. He murmurs :

Hell, it's my wife! My wife, or rather not my wife, Chantever's wife. What a charming hussy she is, after all! . . .

Am I going to want to marry her again now? . . . Good, she's sitting down, reading *Gil Blas*. I'll lie low.

My wife! What a queer feeling it gives me! My wife! As a matter of fact, it's a year, more than a year, since she ceased to be my wife. . . . Yes, she had her points, physically speaking . . . very fine ones; what a leg! It makes me tremble only to think of it. And what a bosom, oh, perfect! Ouf! In the old days we used to play at drill, left—right—left—right—what a bosom! Left or right, it was superb.

But what a holy terror . . . where her morals were concerned!

Has she had lovers? What I suffered from that suspicion! Now, pouf! It doesn't worry me in the least.

I have never seen a more seductive creature when she was getting into bed. She had a way of jumping up and slipping between the sheets. . . .

Good, I am going to fall in love with her again. . . .

Suppose I spoke to her? . . . But what shall I say to her?

And then she would shout for help, because of the thrashing she got. What a thrashing! Perhaps I was a little brutal after all.

Suppose I speak to her? That would be amusing and rather an achievement after all. Damn it, yes, I'll speak to her, and perhaps if I do it very well. . . . We shall soon see. . . .

SCENE 2

He approaches the young woman, who is deep in the study of Gil Blas, and in a sweet voice :

Will you allow me, Madame, to recall myself to your memory ?

Mme de Chantever lifts her head sharply, cries out, and attempts to run away. He bars her way, and says humbly :

You have nothing to fear, Madame. I am not your husband now.

Mme de Chantever : Oh, you dare ! After . . . after what has happened !

M. de Garelle : I dare . . . and I daren't. . . . You see. . . . Explain it as you like. When I caught sight of you, I found it impossible not to come and speak to you.

Mme de Chantever : I hope this joke may now be considered at an end ?

M. de Garelle : It is not a joke.

Mme de Chantever : A bet, then, unless it's merely a piece of insolence. Besides, a man who strikes a woman is capable of anything.

M. de Garelle : You are hard, Madame. It seems to me, however, that you ought not to reproach me to-day for an outburst that—moreover—I regret. On the contrary, I was, I confess, expecting to be thanked by you.

Mme de Chantever (astonished) : What ? You must be mad ! Or else you're attempting some boorish joke.

M. de Garelle : Not at all, Madame, and if you don't understand me, you must be very unhappy.

Mme de Chantever : What do you mean ?

M. de Garelle : That if you were happy with the man who has taken my place, you would be grateful to me for the violence that allowed you to make this new union.

Mme de Chantever : You are pushing the joke too far, sir. Please leave me alone.

M. de Garelle : But, Madame, think of it ! If I had not committed the infamous crime of striking you, we should still be dragging our chains to-day.

Mme de Chantever (wounded) : Indeed, you did me a great service then.

M. de Garelle : I did, didn't I ? A service that deserves better than your recent greeting.

Mme de Chantever : Possibly. But your face is so disagreeable to me . . .

M. de Garelle : I will not say the same of yours.

Mme de Chantever : Your compliments are as distasteful to me as your brutalities.

M. de Garelle : Well, what am I to do, Madame ? I have lost the right to beat you : I am compelled to make myself agreeable.

Mme de Chantever : Well, that's frank, at least. But if you want to be really agreeable, you will go away.

M. de Garelle : I'm not carrying my wish to please you to those lengths yet.

Mme de Chantever : Then what do you want ?

M. de Garelle : To make reparation for my wrongs, if I committed any.

Mme de Chantever (indignant) : What ? If you committed any ! You are mad. You thrashed me cruelly and perhaps you consider that you behaved towards me in the most suitable manner possible.

M. de Garelle : Perhaps I did !

Mme de Chantever : What ? Perhaps you did ?

M. de Garelle : Yes, Madame. You know the comedy called the *Mari Cocu, Battu et Content*. Very well, was I or was I not a cuckold ?—that's the whole question ! In any case, it is you who were beaten, and not happy. . . .

Mme de Chantever (getting up) : Sir, you are insulting me.

M. de Garelle (eagerly) : I implore you to listen to me a moment. I was jealous, very jealous, which proves that I loved you. I beat you, which is a still stronger proof of it, and beat you severely, which proves it up to the hilt. Very well, if you were faithful, and beaten, you have real grounds for complaint, indisputably real, I confess, and. . . .

Mme de Chantever : Don't pity me.

M. de Garelle : What do you mean by that? It can be taken in two ways. Either you mean that you scorn my pity, or that it is undeserved. Very well, if the pity of which I acknowledge you to be worthy is undeserved, then the blows . . . the violent blows you have had from me were more than deserved.

Mme de Chantever : Take it as you please.

M. de Garelle : Good, I understand. So, when I was your husband, Madame, I was a cuckold.

Mme de Chantever : I don't say that.

M. de Garelle : You leave it to be understood.

Mme de Chantever : I leave it to be understood that I don't want your pity.

M. de Garelle : Don't quibble, confess honestly that I was. . . .

Mme de Chantever : Don't say that shameful word. It revolts and disgusts me.

M. de Garelle : I'll let you off the word, but you must acknowledge the thing itself.

Mme de Chantever : Never, it's not true.

M. de Garelle : Then, I pity you with all my heart, and the suggestion I was going to make to you has now no possible justification.

Mme de Chantever : What suggestion?

M. de Garelle : It's no use telling you about it, since it's only feasible if you did deceive me.

Mme de Chantever : Well, suppose for a moment that I did deceive you.

M. de Garelle : That's not sufficient. You must confess it.

Mme de Chantever : I confess it.

M. de Garelle : That's not sufficient. I must have proof.

Mme de Chantever (smiling) : You're asking too much now.

M. de Garelle : No, Madame. As I have said, I was going to make a very serious suggestion to you, very serious ; if I hadn't intended to do so, I should not have come in search of you like this after what we have done to each other, what you did to me in the first place, and I to you afterwards. This suggestion, which can have the most serious consequences, for us both, is worthless if you did not deceive me.

Mme de Chantever : You are an amazing man. But what more do you want ? I did deceive you—there.

M. de Garelle : I must have proof.

Mme de Chantever : But what proofs can I give you ? I haven't them on me, or rather I no longer have them.

M. de Garelle : It doesn't matter where they are. I must have them.

Mme de Chantever : But one can't keep proof of things of that kind . . . and . . . or, at any rate, of a *flagrant délit*.
(*After a pause*) I think my word ought to be enough for you.

M. de Garelle (bowing) : Then, you are ready to swear to it.

Mme de Chantever (lifting her hand) : I swear it.

M. de Garelle (gravely) : I believe you, Madame. And with whom did you deceive me ?

Mme de Chantever : Oh, but now you're asking too much.

M. de Garelle : It is absolutely necessary that I know his name.

Mme de Chantever : It is impossible to give it to you.

M. de Garelle : Why ?

Mme de Chantever : Because I am a married woman.

M. de Garelle : Well ?

Mme de Chantever : And professional secrecy !

M. de Garelle : You're quite right.

Mme de Chantever : Besides, it was with M. de Chantever that I deceived you.

M. de Garelle : That's not true.

Mme de Chantever : Why not ?

M. de Garelle : Because he would not have married you.

Mme de Chantever : Insolent creature ! And this suggestion ? . . .

M. de Garelle : It's this. You have just confessed that, thanks to you, I was one of those ridiculous creatures, always regarded as laughing-stocks whatever they do—comic if they keep their mouths shut, and more grotesque still if they show their resentment—that people call deceived husbands. Well, Madame, it is beyond question that the number of cuts with a riding-whip you received are far from being an adequate compensation for the outrage and the conjugal injury I have experienced by your act, and it is no less beyond question that you owe me a more substantial compensation and a compensation of a different nature, now that I am no longer your husband.

Mme de Chantever : You're mad. What do you mean ?

M. de Garelle : I mean, Madame, that you ought to restore to me to-day the delightful hours you stole from me when I was your husband, to offer them to I don't know whom.

Mme de Chantever : You're mad.

M. de Garelle : Not at all. Your love belonged to me, didn't it ? Your kisses were owing to me, all your kisses, without exception. Isn't that so ? You diverted a part of them for the benefit of another man. Well, it's a matter of the utmost importance to me now that restitution should be

made, made without scandal, secret restitution, as free from scandal and as secret as were the shameless thefts.

Mme de Chantever : What do you take me for ?

M. de Garelle : For the wife of M. de Chantever.

Mme de Chantever : Upon my word, this is too bad.

M. de Garelle : Pardon me, the man with whom you deceived me must have taken you for the wife of M. de Garelle. It's only just that my turn should come. What is too bad is to refuse to restore what is legitimately due.

Mme de Chantever : And if I said yes . . . you would. . .

M. de Garelle : Certainly.

Mme de Chantever : Then, what purpose would the device have served ?

M. de Garelle : The revival of our love.

Mme de Chantever : You never loved me.

M. de Garelle : Yet I am giving you the strongest possible proof that I did.

Mme de Chantever : In what way ?

M. de Garelle : You ask me in what way. When a man is fool enough to offer himself to a woman, first as her husband and then as her lover, it proves that he loves her, or I don't know anything about love.

Mme de Chantever : Oh, don't let us confuse two different things. To marry a woman is a proof either of love or desire, but to make her your mistress is a proof of nothing but . . . scorn. In the first case, a man undertakes all the expense, all the tediums, all the responsibilities of love ; in the second case, he leaves those burdens to the legitimate owner and keeps only the pleasure, with the privilege of disappearing the moment the woman ceases to please. The two cases are hardly on a par.

M. de Garelle : My dear girl, your logic is very weak. When a man loves a woman, he ought not to marry her, because if he marries her he can be sure she will deceive

him, as you did, in my case. There's the proof. While it's incontestable that a mistress remains faithful to the lover with the same desperate intensity of purpose she adopts to deceive her husband. Isn't it so? If you want to create an indissoluble bond between a woman and yourself, arrange for another man to marry her, marriage is only a slender thread to be cut at will, and become that woman's lover: free love is a chain that is never broken—we have cut the thread, I offer you the chain.

Mme de Chantever : You're very amusing. But I refuse.

M. de Garelle : Then, I shall warn M. de Chantever.

Mme de Chantever : You will warn him of what?

M. de Garelle : I shall tell him that you deceived me.

Mme de Chantever : That I deceived you. . . . You. . . .

M. de Garelle : Yes, when you were my wife.

Mme de Chantever : Well?

M. de Garelle : Well, he'll never forgive you for it.

Mme de Chantever : He?

M. de Garelle : Well, dammit, it's not the sort of thing to reassure him.

Mme de Chantever (laughing) : Don't do that, Henry.

A voice on the staircase calling : "Mathilde!"

Mme de Chantever (softly) : My husband! Good-bye.

M. de Garelle (getting up) : I am going to escort you to him and introduce myself.

Mme de Chantever : Don't do that.

M. de Garelle : See if I don't.

Mme de Chantever : Please don't.

M. de Garelle : You accept the chain?

The Voice : Mathilde!

Mme de Chantever : Please go.

M. de Garelle : When shall I see you again?

Mme de Chantever : Here—this evening—after dinner.

M. de Garelle (kissing her hand) : I love you. . . .

She runs away.

M. de Garelle returns calmly to his arm-chair and sinks into it.

Well, it's true. I like this rôle better than the previous one. She's charming, quite charming, and far more charming still since I heard M. de Chantever's voice calling her "Mathilde" like that, in the proprietary tone that husbands have.

THE ODYSSEY OF A PROSTITUTE

YES. THE MEMORY OF THAT EVENING WILL NEVER FADE. For half an hour I realised the sinister reality of implacable fate. I shuddered as a man shudders descending a mine. I plumbed the black depths of human misery; I understand that it is not possible for some people to live a decent life.

It was after midnight. I was going from the Vaudeville to the Rue Drouot, hurrying along the boulevard through a crowd of hurrying umbrellas. A fine rain was not so much falling as hovering in the air, veiling the gas-jets, spreading a gloom over the street. The gleaming pavement was sticky rather than damp. Anxious to get home, the passers-by looked neither to right nor left.

The prostitutes, with skirts held up showing their legs, revealing a white stocking to the wan gleams of evening light, were waiting in the shadow of doorways, speaking to the passers-by or hurrying brazenly past them, thrusting a stupid, incomprehensible phrase at them as they passed. They followed a man for a few seconds, jostling against him, breathing their putrid breath in his face; then, seeing the futility of their appeals, they abandoned him with a sudden, angry movement and took up their promenade again, jerking their hips as they walked.

I went on my way, accosted by them all, seized by the arm, irritated, revolted and disgusted. Suddenly I saw three of them running as if they were terrified, flinging a quick phrase to the others as they ran. And the others began to run too, an open flight, bunching their clothes together so

that they could run the faster. They were making a round-up of prostitutes that night.

Suddenly I felt an arm under mine, while a terrified voice murmured in my ear: "Save me, sir, save me, don't leave me."

I looked at the girl. She was not yet twenty, although already fading. "Stay with me," I said to her. "Oh, thank you," she murmured.

We reached the line of police. It opened to let me pass. And I proceeded down the Rue Drouot.

My companion asked:

"Will you come home with me?"

"No."

"Why not? You have done me a great service, and I shan't forget it."

To get rid of her, I answered:

"Because I'm married."

"What does that matter?"

"Well, my child, that's enough. I've pulled you out of a hole. Leave me alone now."

The street was deserted and dark, really sinister. And this woman clinging to my arm added to the frightful feeling of sadness that had overwhelmed me. She tried to embrace me. I recoiled in horror, and said harshly:

"Be off, and shut your mouth."

She retreated in something like anger, then abruptly began to sob. I stood bewildered, filled with pity, not understanding:

"Come, what's the matter with you?"

She murmured between her tears:

"It's not very pleasant, if you only knew."

"What isn't?"

"The life I live."

"Why did you choose it?"

"It wasn't my fault."

"Then whose fault was it?"

"I know whose it was!"

I felt a sudden interest in this abandoned creature.

"Won't you tell me about yourself?" I asked her.

She told me.

"I was sixteen years old, I was in service at Yvetot, with M. Lerable, a seedsman. My parents were dead. I had no one; I knew quite well that my master looked at me strangely and tickled my cheeks; but I didn't think about it much. I knew a few things, of course. You get pretty shrewd in the country; but M. Lerable was a pious old thing who went to Mass every Sunday. I would never have believed him capable of it.

"Then one day he wanted to make up to me in my kitchen. I resisted him. He went off.

"There was a grocer opposite us, M. Dutan, who had a very agreeable assistant; so agreeable that I let him get round me. That happens to everybody, doesn't it? So I used to leave the door open in the evenings, and he used to come and see me.

"And then one night M. Lerable heard a noise. He came upstairs and found Antoine and tried to kill him. They fought with chairs and the water-jug and everything. I had seized my bit of clothes and I rushed into the street. Off I went.

"I was frightened, scared stiff. I dressed under a doorway. Then I began to walk straight on. I was sure someone had been killed, and the police were looking for me already. I reached the high road to Rouen. I thought to myself that at Rouen I could hide myself quite safely.

"It was too dark to see the ditches, and I heard dogs barking in the farms. You don't know what you hear at night. Birds screaming like a man who's having his throat

cut, beasts that yelp and beasts that wheeze, and all sorts of things that you don't understand. I went all over goose-flesh. I crossed myself at every sound. You can't imagine how that scares you. When it grew light, I thought of the police again and began to run. Then I calmed down.

"I felt hungry too, in spite of my anxiety; but I hadn't a thing, not a ha'penny. I'd forgotten my money, everything belonging to me in the world, eighteen francs.

"So I had to walk with a complaining stomach. It was warm. The sun scorched me. Noon passed. I went on walking.

"Suddenly I heard horses behind me. I turned round. The police! My blood ran cold; I thought I should fall; but I kept myself up. They caught up to me. They looked at me. One of them, the older, said:

" ' Good afternoon, Miss. '

" ' Good afternoon, sir. '

" ' Where are you off like this ? '

" ' I'm going to Rouen, to service in a situation I've been offered. '

" ' Like this, on your two feet ? '

" ' Yes, like this. '

"My heart was beating so that I could hardly speak. I was saying to myself: ' They'll take me. ' And my legs itched to run. But they would have caught me up in a minute, you see.

"The old one began again:

" ' We'll jog along together as far as Barantin, Miss, since we're all going the same way. '

" ' Gladly, sir. '

"So we fell to talking. I made myself as agreeable as I knew how, you may be sure, so agreeable that they thought things that weren't true. And then, as I was walking through a wood, the old one said:

“ ‘What do you say if we go and lie down a bit on the moss?’

“ I answered without stopping to think :

“ ‘Yes, if you like.’

“ Then he dismounted, gave his horse to the other, and off we both went into the wood.

“ There was no chance of saying no. What would you have done in my place? He took what he wanted; then he said: ‘We mustn’t forget the other fellow.’ And he went back to hold the horses, while the other one rejoined me. I was so ashamed of it that I could have cried. But I daren’t resist, you see.

“ So we went on again. I had nothing more to say. I was too sad at heart. And then I was so hungry I couldn’t walk any further. All the same, they offered me a glass of wine in a village, and that heartened me up for a while. And then they set off at a trot, so as not to go through Barantin in my company. Then I sat down in the ditch and cried till I couldn’t cry any more.

“ I was three hours more walking to Rouen. It was seven in the evening when I arrived. At first I was dazzled by all the lights. And then I didn’t know where to sit down. On the roads there’s ditches and grass where you can even lie down to sleep. But in towns there’s nothing.

“ My legs were giving way under me, and I had such fits of giddiness I thought I was going to fall. And then it began to rain, small, fine rain, like this evening, that soaks through you without your noticing it. I have no luck on rainy days. Well, I began to walk in the streets. I stared at all the houses, and said to myself: ‘All those beds and all that bread in those houses, and I couldn’t find even a crust and a mattress.’ I went along the streets, where there were women speaking to passing men. In times like those you

do what you can. I started to speak to every one, as they were doing. But no one answered me. I wished I was dead. I went on like that till midnight. I didn't even know what I was doing now. At last, a man listens to me. 'Where do you live?' he asks. Necessity makes you sharp. I answered: 'I can't take you home, because I live with mamma. But aren't there houses where we can go?'

" 'It's not often I spend a franc on a room,' he answered.

" Then he reflected and added: 'Come on. I know a quiet spot where we shan't be interrupted.'

" He took me over a bridge and then he led me to the end of the town, in a meadow near the river. I couldn't follow him any farther.

" He made me sit down, and then he began to busy himself with what we'd come for. But he was so long about his business that I was overcome with weariness and fell asleep.

" He went away without giving me anything. I didn't hardly notice it. It was raining, as I told you. Ever since that day I've had pains I can't get rid of, because I slept in the mud all the night.

" I was wakened by two cops, who took me to the police station and then, from there, to prison, where I stayed a week while they tried to find out what I could be or where I came from. I wouldn't say anything for fear of consequences.

" They found out, however, and they let me go, after pronouncing me not guilty.

" I had to begin looking for work again. I tried to get a place, but I couldn't, because of coming out of prison.

" Then I remembered an old judge who had rolled his eyes at me when he was trying me, just like old Lerable at Yvetot did. And I went to see him. I wasn't mistaken. He gave me five francs when I came away, and said: 'You

shall have the same every time, but don't come oftener than twice a week.'

"I understood that all right, seeing his age. But that gave me an idea. I said to myself: 'Young men are all right for a bit of fun, and they're jolly and all that, but there's no fat living to be got there, while with old men it's another thing.' And then I'd got to know them, the old apes, with their sheep's eyes and their skinny little heads.

"Do you know what I did? I dressed myself like a servant-girl coming from market, and I ran about the streets, looking for my foster-fathers. Oh, I caught them at the first shot. I used to say to myself: 'Here's one'll bite.'

"He came up. He began:

"'Good day, Miss.'

"'Good day, sir.'

"'Where are you off like this?'

"'I'm going back to my employers' house.'

"'Do they live a long way off, your employers?'

"'So so.'

"Then he didn't know what to say next. I used to slacken step to let him explain himself.

"Then he paid me a few compliments in a low voice, and then he asked me to come home with him. I took some pressing, you understand, then I gave in. I used to have two or three of that sort every morning, and all my afternoons free. That was the best time of my life. I didn't worry.

"But there. One's not left in peace long. Ill-luck had it that I got to know a wealthy old devil in society. A former President, who was at least seventy-five years old.

"One evening he took me to dine in a restaurant in the suburbs. And then, you see, he hadn't the sense to go carefully. He died during the dessert.

" I got three months in prison, because I wasn't registered.

" It was then I came to Paris.

" Oh, it's a hard life here, sir. You don't eat every day. There's too many of us. Ah, well, it can't be helped, every one has their own troubles, haven't they ? "

She was silent. I was walking beside her, sick at heart. Suddenly she began to talk familiarly again.

" So you're not coming home with me, dearie ? "

" No. I told you so before."

" Well, good-bye, thanks all the same, and no offence taken. But I assure you you're making a mistake."

And she went off, through the fine veil of the rain. I saw her pass under a gas-jet, then disappear in the shadows. Poor wretch !

THE WINDOW

I MADE THE ACQUAINTANCE OF MME DE JADELLE IN PARIS this winter. I liked her immensely, at once. But you know her as well as I . . . no . . . pardon . . . almost as well as I . . . You know how whimsical and romantic she is, all at once. Frank in manner and impressionable of heart, wilful, unconventional, fearless, adventurous, audacious, contemptuous of all prejudice, and, in spite of that, sentimental, fastidious, easily offended, sensitive and modest.

She was a widow. I adore widows, because I am indolent. I was thinking of marrying, and I paid court to her. The better I knew her, the better I liked her ; and I decided that the moment had come to venture my request. I was in love with her, and I was on the verge of being too much in love. When a man marries, he ought not to be too much in love with his wife, because that makes a blundering fool of him : he loses his self-possession, and becomes both stupid and crude. He must hold on to his self-control. If he loses his head the first night, he runs a great risk of having it antlered a year later.

So one day I presented myself at her house in a pair of light gloves and said to her :

"Madame, I am so fortunate as to love you, and I come to ask you whether I may hope to please you—to do which I will use all my best endeavours—and to give you my name."

She answered placidly :

"As you like ! I really don't know if I shall end by liking you ; but I ask nothing better than to put it to the

test. As a man, I rather like you. It remains to discover what you are like in disposition and character, what sort of habits you have. Most marriages become stormy or immoral, because parties to them did not know each other well enough when they married. The merest trifle, a deep-rooted obsession, a tenacious opinion on some point of ethics, religion or anything else, an annoying gesture, a bad habit, the least fault or even a disagreeable trait, is enough to make two irreconcilable enemies, implacably bitter and chained together until death, of the tenderest and most passionate lovers.

"I shall never marry unless I know intimately, in every crack and cranny of his nature, the man whose life I am about to share. I want to study him at leisure, and at close quarters, for months.

"This is what I suggest: You shall come to spend the summer with me on my estate at Lauville, and there in that quiet place we shall see whether we are fitted to live side by side. . . .

"I see you laughing. You're thinking ill. Oh, my dear man, if I were not sure of myself, I shouldn't make the suggestion to you. I have such scorn and loathing for love, as you men understand it, that I should never be tempted to lose my head. Do you accept?"

I kissed her hand.

"When do we start, Madame?"

"May the tenth. Is it a bargain?"

"It's a bargain."

A month later, I was installed in her house. She really was a singular woman. She studied me from morning till evening. As she adores horses, we spent hours riding in the woods every day, talking about everything under the sun, for she was bent on probing my most intimate thoughts, as earnestly as she strove to observe my smallest actions.

As for me, I became madly in love with her and I troubled myself not a whit about the harmony of our natures. I soon became aware that even my slumbers were subject to surveillance. Someone slept in a little room next mine, never entering it until late at night, and with infinite precautions. At last I became impatient of this incessant spying. I wanted to hasten the issue, and one evening I became urgent. She dealt with me in such a way that I refrained from all further attempts; but I was seized with a violent desire to make her pay, somehow or other, for the surveillance to which I was subjected, and I pondered on ways and means.

You know Césarine, her maid, a pretty girl from Granville, where all the girls are beautiful—but as fair as her mistress is dark.

One afternoon I drew the maid into my room, slipped five francs into her hand, and said to her:

“My dear child, I’m not going to ask you to do anything wrong, but I want to treat your mistress as she is treating me.”

The little maid smiled mockingly. I went on:

“I know I’m watched day and night. I’m watched eating, drinking, dressing, shaving, and putting on my socks, I know it.”

The young girl got out:

“Well, you see, sir. . . .” She stopped. I continued:

“You sleep in the room next mine to listen if I snore, or if I talk in my sleep, don’t deny it.”

She began to laugh outright, and said:

“Well, you see, sir. . . .” then stopped again.

I warmed to my theme:

“Well, you realise, my girl, that it’s not just that everything should be known about me and I should know nothing about the lady who will be my wife. I love her with all my soul. She is my ideal in looks, mind and heart; so far as that

goes, I'm the happiest of men. However, there are some things I would give a lot to know. . . ."

Césarine decided to thrust my bank-note into her pocket. I understood that she had come to terms.

"Listen, my girl, we men, we think a lot of certain . . . certain . . . physical details, which don't prevent a woman from being charming, but can alter her value in our eyes. I'm not asking you to speak ill of your mistress, nor even to confess her secret faults, if she has any. Only answer frankly four or five questions I'm going to put to you. You know Mme de Jadelle as well as you know yourself, since you dress and undress her every day. Well, now, tell me this : Is she as plump as she seems to be ?"

The little maid did not answer.

I went on :

"Come, my child, you're not ignorant that some women put wadding, you know, wadding where, where . . . well, wadding in the place where babies are fed, and on the place where you sit down. Tell me, does she pad ?"

Césarine had lowered her gaze. She said timidly :

"Ask all your questions, sir. I'll answer them all at once."

"Well, my girl, some women have knock-knees, too, so badly that they rub against each other with every step they take. Others have them so widely separated that their legs are like the arches of a bridge. You can see the countryside through them. Both fashions are very pretty. Tell me what your mistress's legs are like."

The little maid did not answer.

I continued :

"Some women have such a fine breast that it forms a deep fold underneath. Some have plump arms and a thin figure. Some are well shaped in front and have no shape at all behind ; others are well shaped behind and have no shape in front. All these fashions are very pretty, very

pretty ; but I would dearly like to know how your mistress is shaped. Tell me frankly and I will give you still more money."

Césarine looked at me searchingly and, laughing heartily, said :

" Except that she's dark, sir, Madame is shaped just like me." Then she ran away.

I was sold.

This time I felt a fool, and I determined that I would at least avenge myself on this impertinent maid.

An hour later, I cautiously entered the little room where she listened to my slumbers, and unscrewed the bolts.

She arrived about midnight at her observation post. I followed her at once. When she saw me, she made as if to cry out ; but I shut her mouth with my hand and convinced myself with very little trouble that, unless she was lying, Mme de Jadelle must be very well made indeed.

I even took a great delight in this process of verification, which, moreover, pushed a little farther, did not seem any less pleasing to Césarine.

She was, upon my word, a ravishing specimen of the Bas-Normande race, at once sturdy and slender. She was innocent of certain delicate refinements that Henry IV would have scorned. I very soon taught her them, and as I adore perfumes, I made her a present that same evening of a flask of amber lavender.

We were soon more attached than I would have believed possible, almost friends. She became an exquisite mistress, naturally intelligent, made for the pleasures of love. In Paris she would have been a notable courtesan.

The delights she afforded me enabled me to wait patiently for the end of Mme de Jadelle's test. My behaviour became quite irreproachable, I was pliant, docile, complaisant.

As for my betrothed, she must have found me quite

delightful, and I was aware from certain signs that I was soon to be fully accepted. I was certainly one of the happiest men in the world, placidly waiting for the lawful kiss of a woman I adored in the arms of a young and beautiful girl of whom I was uncommonly fond.

This, Madame, is where you must turn away a little. I have come to the delicate point.

One evening, as we were coming back from our ride, Mme de Jadelles complained bitterly that the grooms had not given her mount certain attentions upon which she insisted. She even repeated several times: "They'd better take care, they'd better take care. I know how to catch them out."

I passed a quiet night, in my bed. I woke up early, full of life and energy. And I dressed.

I had formed the habit of going every morning to smoke a cigarette on a turret of the château that had a spiral staircase, lit by a large window at the height of the first floor.

I was advancing silently, my feet in felt-soled morocco slippers, to ascend the first steps, when I saw Césarine leaning out of the window looking out.

I did not see the whole of Césarine, but only one-half of Césarine, the lower half of her. I preferred this half! I might have preferred the upper half of Mme de Jadelles. The half presented to me was delightful, clad in a little white petticoat that hardly covered it.

I approached so softly that the young girl heard nothing. I knelt down; with infinite caution I took hold of the two edges of the petticoat and lifted it quickly. Immediately I recognised, round, fresh, plump and smooth, my mistress's secret face, and I pressed on it—pardon, Madame—I pressed on it a tender kiss, the kiss of a lover who dares do anything.

I was surprised. There was a fragrance of verbenas. But I had no time to think about it. I received a terrific blow,

or rather a push in the face, that almost broke my nose. I heard a cry that made my hair stand on end. The woman turned round—it was Mme de Jadelles.

She beat the air with her hands like a woman on the verge of fainting; for a few moments she stood gasping, lifted her hand as if to thrash me, then fled.

Ten minutes later, a dumbfounded Césarine brought me a letter. I read: "Mme de Jadelles hopes that M. de Brives will relieve her of his company at once."

I went.

Well, I am still disconsolate. I have tried by every means and every explanation to win pardon for my error. All my endeavours have been in vain.

Since that moment, do you know, I cherish in . . . in my heart . . . a faint fragrance of verbena that fills me with a wild longing to savour its sweetness again.

THE OLIVE ORCHARD

I

WHEN THE SHORE-LOAFERS OF THE LITTLE PROVENÇAL PORT of Garandou on the Bay of Pisca, between Marseilles and Toulon, caught sight of Abbé Vilbois' boat coming back from fishing, they went down to the beach to help him draw it in.

The Abbé was alone in the boat, rowing like a seaman, with unusual energy, in spite of his fifty-eight years. His sleeves were turned up over his muscular arms, his cassock drawn up, gathered tightly between his knees and unbuttoned at the top, his shovel-hat on the seat beside him and a pith-helmet covered with white linen on his head. He looked like one of those solidly built, fantastic priests from the tropics, more suited for adventure than for saying Mass.

Occasionally he looked behind to make sure of his landing, then pulled again, rhythmically and steadily and strongly, to show the poor Southern sailors once again how men from the North could row. The boat shot forward, touching the sand, over which it glided as if it were going to climb up the beach on its keel, then stopped dead, and the five men who were watching drew near, affable, cheerful, and friendly with their priest.

"Well," said one of them with a strong Provençal accent, "had a good catch, your Reverence?"

Abbé Vilbois shipped his oars, took off his helmet, put on his shovel-hat, dropped his sleeves over his arms, buttoned

up his cassock and, resuming his official, priestly attitude and bearing, replied proudly :

" Yes, very good, three cat-fish, two eels, and a few rock-fish."

Going up to the boat and leaning over the gunwale, the five fishermen examined the dead fish with an expert air—the fleshy cat-fish, the flat-headed eels—hideous sea serpents—and the violet rock-fish with zigzag stripes and gold bands, the colour of orange-peel.

One of the men said : " I will carry them to your summer-house, your Reverence."

" Thanks, my good man."

Shaking their hands, the priest started off, followed by the one fisherman, the others staying behind to look after the boat.

The priest, robust and dignified, strode along with big, slow steps. As he still felt warm from his vigorous rowing, he took off his hat whenever he reached the slight shade of the olive-trees, to expose his square-cut brow with its straight, white hair cut short—more the brow of an officer than of a priest—to the tepid night air, now slightly freshened by a faint sea breeze. The village revealed itself up on a bluff in the middle of a wide valley that ran down like a plain towards the sea.

It was a July evening. The dazzling sun, nearing the jagged crest of the distant hills, stretched out the priest's long shadow on the white road, buried under a shroud of dust; the contorted shadow of his hat passed over the neighbouring field, a great dark patch which seemed to be playing at climbing up the olive-trunks it met, dropping swiftly down, and crawling on the earth among the trees.

From under Abbé Vilbois' feet rose a cloud of that fine, floury dust that covers the roads of Provence in summer, curling round his cassock like a veil and colouring its hem

with a faint wash of grey over the black. He strode along refreshed now, his hands in his pockets, with the slow, measured gait of a mountaineer making an ascent. His unruffled eyes gazed upon the village of which he had been the *curé* for twenty years, the village he had picked out and obtained as a great favour, and where he hoped to die. The church—his church—crowned the wide circle of houses huddled together around it with its two uneven, square towers of brown stone whose venerable outlines dominated this beautiful Southern valley, more like the donjons of a fortified castle than the steeples of a church.

The Abbé was pleased, because he had caught three cat-fish, two eels, and a few rock-fish. This would be a new little triumph over his parishioners, who respected him chiefly because he was the strongest man in the country, in spite of his age. These little harmless vanities were his greatest pleasure. He could cut off a flower from its stalk with a pistol-shot, sometimes he fenced with his neighbour, the tobacconist, who had been a regimental fencing-master, and he swam better than anyone on the coast.

Indeed, he, Baron de Vilbois, had been a man of the world, well known and a leader of fashion, till he had turned priest at thirty-two, after an unhappy love-affair.

Descended from an old royalist family of Picardy, staunch churchmen, whose sons had been in the Army, the Church, and the Law for many generations, his first intention was to enter holy orders, as his mother advised, but his father's objections prevailed, and he decided to go to Paris, study law, and then try for some important post at the Law Courts.

As he was finishing his course, his father died of pneumonia caught on a shooting expedition on the marshes, and his mother died shortly after of grief. Having thus suddenly inherited a large fortune, he gave up his plans of adopting

any profession whatever and was content to live the life of a man of means. Handsome and intelligent, although limited by the beliefs, traditions, and principles he had inherited from his family together with his Picard muscles, he was popular and successful in the more serious circles of society and led the pleasant life of a wealthy, respected, conventional young man.

Unfortunately, after a few meetings at a friend's house, he fell in love with a young actress, a student from the Conservatoire who had made a brilliant first appearance at the Odéon.

He fell in love with the violence and passion of a man destined to believe in absolute ideas. He fell in love, seeing her through the medium of the romantic part in which she had made her successful first public appearance.

She was pretty, naturally perverse, with the ways of a spoilt child that he called "her angel-ways." She gained complete ascendancy over him, turning him into a raging maniac, a frenzied lunatic, one of those miserable beings whom the glance or the skirt of a woman consumes at the stake of a mortal passion. He made her his mistress, forced her to leave the stage, and loved her for four years with an ever-growing passion. Indeed, he would have married her in spite of his name and the family tradition of honour had he not suddenly discovered that she was deceiving him with the friend who had introduced them to each other.

The blow fell with all the more force because she was *enceinte* and he was awaiting the child's birth to make up his mind to get married.

When he possessed the proofs—letters accidentally found in a drawer—he accused her of infidelity, treachery, and double-dealing, with the brutality of the semi-savage he was.

But this child of the Paris streets, impudent and vicious, feeling as sure of her second lover as she did of Vilbois, as

bold as those viragoes of the Revolution who climb the barricades out of sheer bravado, defied and insulted him, pointing to her condition when she saw him raise his hand.

He stopped and turned pale, remembering that a child of his was there within that polluted flesh, in that defiled body, that unclean creature : his child !

He threw himself at her to destroy them both, to blot out the double shame. Terrified, feeling herself lost as she cowered beneath his blows, as she saw his foot raised to kick the swollen belly which already contained a living human embryo, she cried with hands outstretched to save herself :

“ Don't kill me. It is not yours, it is his.”

He started back, stupefied and overcome, his anger momentarily fading, while his foot hovered in mid-air, and he stammered :

“ What . . . what are you saying ? ”

Wild with fright at the signal of death she had caught in his eyes and at the man's terrifying gesture, she repeated :

“ It is not yours, it is his.”

Appalled, he muttered between clenched teeth :

“ The child ? ”

“ Yes.”

“ You are lying.”

And again he lifted his foot for a crushing blow, while his mistress, raising herself to her knees, tried to move away, murmuring all the time :

“ But I tell you it is his. If it was yours, would not I have had it long ago ? ”

This argument struck him as the truth itself. In one of those flashes of thought when all the arguments on a question are seen together in a blinding clarity, precise, unanswerable, conclusive, irresistible, he was convinced, he was sure that he was not the father of the wretched waif-child she was

carrying ; and relieved, freed, suddenly almost at rest, he gave up the idea of killing this foul creature.

He said more gently :

“ Get up, go away, never let me see you again.”

Subdued, she obeyed and went away.

He never saw her again.

He, too, went away. He went down to the South, to the sun, and stopped in a village in the middle of a valley on the Mediterranean. He was attracted by an inn facing the sea, took a room there, and stayed. He stayed there for eighteen months, lost in grief and despair, living in complete isolation. He lived there obsessed by the memory of the woman who had betrayed him, of her charm, her personality, her unbelievable witchery, and filled with longing for her presence, her caressings.

He wandered through the valleys of Provence, seeking relief for his aching head with its burden of memory in the sun that filtered gently through the dull grey leaves of the olive-trees.

In this solitude of suffering the old piety, the steadied fervour of his early faith, revived in his heart. Religion, which had once seemed to him a refuge from unknown life, now appeared as a haven of escape from life's treachery and cruelty. He had never lost the habit of prayer, and now he clung to it in his great sorrow, and often went at dusk to kneel in the darkened church, lit only by the glimmer of the lamp on the altar, the holy guardian of the sanctuary and symbol of the Divine Presence.

He confided his trouble to God, to his God, telling Him all his sorrow. He begged for advice, pity, help, protection, consolation, putting more and more feeling into his prayers, which grew in fervour from day to day.

His wounded heart, ravaged by carnal love, was bare and throbbing, longing for tenderness, and little by little,

through prayer and piety, by giving himself up to that secret communion of the devout with the Saviour who brings consolation and is a sure refuge to those in distress, the mystic love of God entered in him and drove out the other love.

He went back to his early plans and decided to devote to the Church the broken life whose first purity he had denied her.

He became a priest. Through family influence he was appointed priest of the Provencal village into which chance had thrown him, and having given a large part of his fortune to benevolent institutions, only retaining sufficient to enable him to help and succour the poor until he died, he settled down to a quiet life full of good works and of care for his fellow-creatures.

He was a narrow-minded priest, but kind to his people, a religious leader with a soldier's temperament, a guide who forcibly led the sinner into the narrow way : the poor blind sinner lost in the forest of life where all our instincts, our desires, our tastes, are bypaths which lead us astray. But much of the man of old days remained. He still liked violent exercise, sport and fencing, and he detested all women with the fear of a child before some hidden danger.

II

The sailor who was with the priest was longing, true Southerner that he was, for a chat, but dared not begin, for the Abbé exercised great authority over his flock. At last he ventured :

"So you are comfortable in your summer-house, your Reverence ?"

The summer-house in question was one of the tiny houses

in which the Provençals of the towns and villages camp in summer, in search of fresh air. The Abbé had rented this retreat in a field, five minutes' walk from the presbytery, which was too small and enclosed in the centre of the parish, right up against the church.

Even in summer he did not live regularly at the cottage : he only went there occasionally for a few days to be amongst the fields and trees and to do some pistol-practice.

"Yes, my friend," said the priest. "I am very comfortable there."

The low dwelling appeared among the trees, its pink surface speckled, striped and split up into little bits by the leaves and branches of the olive-trees planted over the open field, on which the cottage seemed to have sprouted like a Provençal mushroom.

At the same moment they saw a tall woman moving about in front of the door, getting the little dinner-table ready as she went backwards and forwards, with methodical leisureliness setting the cloth for one, a plate, table-napkin, piece of bread, and glass. She wore a little Arlésienne cap, the pointed cone of black silk or velvet topped by a white starched mushroom.

When the Abbé was within hearing distance, he called out :

"Hey, Marguerite !"

She stopped to look round and, recognising her master, said :

"Oh, it's you, your Reverence ?"

"Yes, I am bringing a good haul, you must grill me a cat-fish at once, cooked in butter, only butter, you hear ?"

The servant, who had come to meet the two men, examined the fish the sailor was carrying, with an expert eye.

"But we have already got a chicken cooked with rice."

"Never mind that, to-morrow's fish is not as good as fish fresh from the sea. I am going to have a really choice

meal, it does not often happen; moreover, it is not a great sin."

The servant picked out the fish and, as she was carrying it away, turned round:

"A man has been here three times to see you, your Reverence."

He asked, indifferently:

"A man! What kind of man?"

"Not much, to judge from his looks."

"What, a beggar?"

"Perhaps. I don't know. I rather think he is a *maoufatan*."

Abbé Vilbois laughed at this Provençal word which means a bad lot, a tramp, for he knew Marguerite's timorous soul. At the cottage she lived day and night in expectation of assassination.

He gave the sailor a few pence, and was preparing to wash his face and hands (having kept his old habits of neatness and cleanliness), when Marguerite called out from the kitchen, where she was scraping the blood-flecked scales that came away from the fish like tiny pieces of silver:

"There he is!"

The Abbé turned towards the road and saw a man, who seemed in the distance to be very badly dressed, walking towards the house with very small steps. He awaited him, still smiling at his servant's fright, thinking: "Upon my word, I think she's right, he certainly looks a bad lot."

Without hurrying, the unknown individual drew near, hands in his pockets, and his eyes fixed upon the priest. He was young, with a fair, curly beard, and hair that fell in curls under a soft felt hat, which was so dirty and crushed that no one could have guessed its original colour and shape. He wore a brown overcoat, trousers that hung in a fringe

over his ankles, and string-sandals that gave him a slack, silent, disquieting walk, a tramp's stealthy slouch.

When a few steps away from the priest, he took off the ragged hat that covered his head, with a flourish, exposing a withered, dissolute, but well-shaped head, bald on the top—a sign of fatigue or of early debauchery, for the man was certainly not over twenty-five.

The priest immediately took off his hat too, for he felt that this was no ordinary vagabond, or unemployed, neither was he the habitual jail-bird wandering about between two prisons who had forgotten all speech except the mysterious language of the convict.

"Good day, your Reverence," said the man. The priest replied simply: "Good day," not wishing to call this doubtful, ragged passer-by "sir." They stared at each other; the fixed, steady look of the tramp made Abbé Vilbois feel uncomfortable, distressed as before an unknown enemy, and attacked by one of those strange feelings of uneasiness that send shivers through body and blood. At last the vagabond said:

"Well! do you recognise me?"

The priest replied, very astonished:

"I? Not at all, I don't know you."

"Ah! You don't know me. Look at me again."

"What is the good of looking at you? I have never seen you before."

"That is true enough," said the other ironically, "but I will show you someone you do know."

He put on his hat and unbuttoned his coat, under which his chest was bare. A red sash wound round his thin waist held his trousers up over his hips.

He took an envelope from his pocket—an envelope marked with every possible kind of stain, one of those envelopes that tramps keep tucked away in the lining of

their clothes, containing the papers, genuine or faked, stolen or legally correct, which are treasured defences of their liberty in encounters with the police. From the envelope he drew a photograph of the letter-size once common : yellow, crumpled with much handling, faded by the heat of the body against which it had been kept.

Holding it up to the Abbé, he asked :

" And him, do you know him ? "

The Abbé took two steps forward to see better, then stopped ; he turned pale, profoundly distressed, for this was a photograph of himself taken for *her* in the bygone days of his love.

Still he did not understand and made no reply.

The tramp repeated :

" Do you recognise him ? "

The priest stammered :

" Yes."

" Who is it ? "

" Me."

" It is really you ? "

" Certainly."

" Right ; now look at your photograph, then look at me."

The miserable priest had already seen that the two—the man in the photograph and the man grinning beside him—were as alike as two brothers, but still he did not understand and stammered :

" What do you want me to do ? "

With a malevolent voice the beggar said :

" What do I want ? Well, first of all I want you to recognise me."

" But who are you ? "

" What am I ? Ask the first-comer on the road, ask the servant ; if you like, let us go and ask the mayor of the village and show him the photograph ; he will have a good

laugh, I promise you. Ah! you refuse to recognise me as your son, Papa *curé*? ”

The old man, lifting his arms with a biblical and despairing gesture, moaned :

“ It can't be true.”

The young man drew nearer and, facing him, said :

“ Ah! It can't be true. Ah! you priest, stop lying, do you hear? ”

The expression on his face was threatening, his fists were clenched, he spoke with so much violence that the Abbé, moving further away, asked himself which of the two was making a mistake.

However, he insisted again :

“ I never had a child.”

The other retorted :

“ And you never had a mistress either? ”

The old man uttered resolutely a single word, a dignified assent :

“ Yes.”

“ And this mistress was not with child when you turned her out? ”

Suddenly the old rage, stifled twenty-five years ago—not stifled but walled-up deep in the lover's heart—burst asunder the fabric of faith, of resigned devotion to God, of renunciation of the world that he had built up over it; and beside himself with rage, he shouted :

“ I turned her out because she had deceived me and was with child by another, otherwise I would have killed her, sir, and you too.”

The young man hesitated, surprised at the sincerity of the *curé*'s outburst; he said in a gentler tone :

“ And who told you the child was another's? ”

“ She did, she herself, while she defied me.”

Without questioning this statement, the tramp said

with the casual manner of a street-boy pronouncing judgment :

"Well, then, mamma made a mistake when she defied you, that's all."

Quickly regaining self-control after his sudden outburst, the Abbé asked in his turn :

"And who told you that you were my son ?"

"She did when she was dying, your Reverence. . . . Besides, what about this !"

And he held the little photograph up to the priest.

The old man took it, and slowly, long, with anguish in his heart, he compared this unknown passer-by with his old photograph, and doubted no more : this was indeed his son.

Distress filled him, an inexpressible emotion, intensely painful, like remorse for some old crime. He understood a little, guessed the rest, and saw again the brutal scene of their parting. To save her life, threatened by the man she had wronged, the woman—the deceitful, faithless female—had thrust this lie at him. . . . And the lie had succeeded. A son of his had been born, grown up, and turned into this sordid tramp who stank of vice as a he-goat stinks of the beast.

He said in a low voice :

"Will you go for a short stroll with me so that we may clear the matter up ?"

The other sneered :

"Will I ? That is what I came for."

They went off together, side by side, through the olive orchard. The sun had gone down and the keen freshness of the Southern twilight spread its invisible, cooling cloak over the country-side. The Abbé shivered ; raising his eyes to Heaven in the usual orthodox way, he saw all around him, trembling against the sky, the small grey leaves of the holy tree which had sheltered under its frail shadow

the greatest of all suffering—the one moment of Christ's weakness. A brief and desperate prayer welled up within him, spoken with that inner voice that never passes the lips, with which believers call upon the Saviour: "O God, help me."

Then, turning towards his son:

"Then your mother is dead?"

As he said the words: "Your mother is dead," a new wave of grief swept through him, making his heart sink, a curious torment of the forgetful human flesh, a cruel echo of the torture he had suffered; but most of all, because she was dead, a shiver of that delirious, short-lived happiness which had left nothing behind it but the scar of remembrance.

The young man replied:

"Yes, your Reverence, my mother is dead."

"Long ago?"

"Three years ago."

Another doubt troubled the priest.

"Why did you not come sooner and look for me?"

The other hesitated.

"I could not. I was prevented. . . . But excuse me if I interrupt the secrets which I will reveal to you later on, with as many details as you please, to say that I have had nothing to eat since yesterday morning."

The old man was filled with pity, and quickly holding out his hands, he said: "Oh, my poor child."

The young man took the outstretched hands, which closed over his thin, moist, feverish fingers. Then he replied with the sardonic air which never left him:

"Well, really, I begin to think we shall get on together after all."

The *curé* started walking again.

"Let us go and dine," he said.

Suddenly he remembered with a vague feeling of pleasure

that was odd and confused, the beautiful fish he had caught, which, with the chicken and rice, would make a good meal for the wretched youngster.

The Arlésienne, anxious and beginning to grumble, was waiting for them at the door.

"Marguerite," cried the Abbé, "take away the table and carry it into the room, quick, quick, and set the cloth for two, quick."

The servant stood aghast at the thought that her master was going to dine with a criminal.

Then the Abbé Vilbois himself began to take the things away and remove what had been set for him into the single room on the ground floor.

Five minutes later he was seated opposite the tramp before a tureen full of cabbage soup that sent up a faint cloud of boiling steam between their faces.

III

When the plates were full, the tramp started to swallow his soup greedily, in quick spoonfuls. The Abbé was not hungry now, and he only took a few sips of the savoury cabbage soup, leaving the bread at the bottom of the plate.

Suddenly he asked :

"What is your name ?"

The man, glad to be satisfying his hunger, laughed.

"Father unknown," he said, "no surname except my mother's, which you have probably not forgotten. On the other hand, I have two Christian names, which, by the way, certainly do not suit me : Philippe-Auguste."

The Abbé turned pale and asked with a strangled voice :

"Why were you given those Christian names ?"

The vagabond shrugged his shoulders.

"I expect you can guess why. After leaving you, mamma wanted to make your rival believe that I was his child, and he did believe it until I was about fifteen. Then I grew too like you. He repudiated me, the scoundrel! I had been given the two Christian names, Philippe-Auguste, and if I had had the luck not to be like anybody, or simply to have been the son of a third unknown ne'er-do-well, I should now be known as the Viscount Philippe-Auguste de Pravallon, the recently acknowledged son of the Count of that name, the Senator. As for me, I christened myself 'No Luck.'"

"How do you know all this?"

"Because there were scenes in my presence, and violent they were, you may be sure. Ah! that is the sort of thing that teaches you life."

A still more painful and stricken feeling than what he had felt and suffered in the last half-hour oppressed the priest. It was the beginning of a form of suffocation that would grow worse and worse until it killed him, caused not so much by the things he was told as by the way they were told, and by the brutish face of the outcast that gave emphasis to them. Between this man and himself, between his son and himself, he began to feel that swamp of moral filth that works as a deadly poison on certain beings. This was his son? He still could not believe it. He wanted every proof, every possible proof; he must learn all, hear all, listen to all, and suffer all. Again he thought of the olive-trees surrounding his little house, again he murmured: "Oh, God help me!"

Philippe-Auguste had finished his soup, and asked:

"Is there no more to eat, Abbé?"

As the kitchen was outside the house in an annexe, Marguerite could not hear the *curé's* voice, so he warned her

of his needs by a few strokes on a Chinese gong that hung behind him on the wall.

He picked up a leather hammer and struck the round metal plaque several times. A sound escaped from it, faint at first, then growing louder and stronger, the vibrating, sharp, violent, horrible, strident clamour of beaten copper.

The servant appeared. Her face was drawn, and she glared at the scoundrel as if, with the instinct of a faithful dog, she felt a presentiment of the drama that was hanging over her master. In her hands she held the grilled fish, which sent out a delicious odour of melted butter. The Abbé divided the fish from head to tail and offered the back fillet to the child of his youth.

"I caught it just now," he said, a remnant of pride hovering in his distress.

Marguerite stayed in the room.

The priest continued :

"Bring some wine, good wine, some of the white wine of Cape Corsica."

She seemed almost ready to rebel, and he had to repeat sternly :

"Now then, two bottles." For when he offered wine to a guest—an unusual pleasure—he always stood himself a bottle too.

Philippe-Auguste said, beaming :

"A jolly good idea. I haven't had a meal like this for a long time."

The servant came back two minutes later. The two minutes had seemed as long as a twofold eternity to the Abbé : the desire to know was scorching his blood now, consuming it like hell-fire.

The bottles were uncorked, and still the servant lingered with eyes fixed on the young man.

"Leave us," said the *curé*.

She pretended not to hear.

He repeated, almost harshly :

"I told you to leave us alone."

Then she left the room.

Philippe-Auguste ate the fish greedily, while his father, watching him, became more and more surprised and distressed at the degradation he saw in the face so like his own. The morsels that the Abbé Vilbois lifted to his lips refused to pass his contracted throat, and he chewed them slowly, casting about in his mind for the most urgent of the questions that crowded upon him.

He ended by saying :

"What did she die of?"

"Of lung trouble."

"Was she ill long?"

"About eighteen months."

"How did she get it?"

"No one knows."

A silence fell upon them. The Abbé was lost in thought. Too many things weighed on him that he wanted to know, for since the day of the rupture, the day when he had almost killed her, he had heard nothing. It was true that he had not wanted news; he had resolutely buried all memory of her and of his days of happiness. But now that she was dead, he felt a sudden violent desire to know everything, a jealous desire, almost a lover's desire.

He resumed :

"She was not alone, was she?"

"No, she was still living with him."

The old man shrank within himself.

"With him, with Pravallon?"

"Of course."

And the man who had been betrayed so long ago cal-

culated that the woman who had deceived him had lived over twenty years with his rival.

Almost in spite of himself, he stammered :

"Were they happy together?"

The young man replied, grinning :

"Well, yes, though there were ups and downs. It would have been all right but for me. I always spoilt everything."

"How, and why?" said the priest.

"I have already told you. Because he believed I was his son until I was about fifteen. But he was no fool, the old man, he discovered the likeness himself, and then there were rows. He accused mamma of having sold him. Mamma retorted: 'Am I to blame? When you took me, you knew quite well that I was the other's mistress.' 'The other' was you."

"Oh, so they talked about me sometimes?"

"Yes, but they never mentioned your name in front of me, except at the end, the very end, the last days when mamma knew she was done for. They were cautious, all the same."

"And you . . . did you soon learn that your mother was living an irregular life?"

"What do you think? I am not a fool, you bet, I never was. You guess these things directly, as soon as you know something of life."

Philippe-Auguste was pouring out one glass of wine after another. His eyes lighted up, intoxication quickly followed his long fast. The priest noticed this and was about to stop him, when he remembered that drink makes men reckless and talkative, so he took the bottle and refilled the young man's glass.

Marguerite brought in the dish of chicken and rice. As she placed it on the table, she glared at the tramp again, then said to her master indignantly :

"Just look how drunk he is, your Reverence."

"Leave us alone and go away," said the priest.

She went out slamming the door.

He asked :

"What did your mother say about me ? "

"The usual thing one says about a man one's left : that you were not easy to live with, a worry to a woman, and that you would have made her life very difficult with your ideas."

"Did she say that often ? "

"Yes, sometimes in a roundabout way so that I should not understand, but I guessed what had happened."

"And you, how were you treated in the home ? "

"Me ? Very well at first, but very badly later on. When mamma saw I was in the way, she chucked me out."

"How ? "

"How ! Quite easily. I played some pranks when I was about sixteen, so the swine put me into a reformatory to get rid of me."

He put his elbows on the table, resting his cheeks on his hands, and quite drunk, his wits turned upside-down by the wine, he suddenly felt that irresistible wish to talk about himself that sets drunkards on to fantastic bragging. He had a pretty smile, a charming, female smile, a perverse charm which the Abbé recognised. He recognised it and felt it too, the hated, caressing charm that had conquered and ruined him in the past. For the moment the young man was more like his mother, not in feature, but in the alluring and insincere expression of his face, and more especially in the attraction of that misleading smile that seemed to open a door on all the incredible baseness of his nature.

Philippe-Auguste continued :

"Well, well ! I have had a life, I have, ever since I left

the reformatory, a curious life, a novelist would give pounds to hear. Really, old Dumas with his Monte Cristo never imagined stranger adventures than have happened to me."

He was silent, with the philosophical seriousness of the meditative drunkard, then he said slowly :

"If you want a boy to turn out well, no matter what he has done he should never be sent to a reformatory, because of the people he has to mix with. I had a jolly good idea, but it failed. One night about nine o'clock I was wandering around with three pals, all four of us rather the worse for drink, on the main road near Folac Ferry, when what should I see but a carriage with every one in it asleep, both the driver and his family, Martinon folk coming home from dinner in town. I took the horse by the reins and led it on to the ferry-boat, then I pushed the boat into the middle of the river. That made a noise, and the driver woke up and didn't see anything and whipped. Off went the horse and jumped into the stream with the carriage. All drowned ! My pals informed against me. At first they laughed like anything when they watched me play the joke. We never thought it would turn out so badly. All we expected was a bath, something to laugh about.

"Since that I have done worse out of revenge for the first joke, which, I must say, did not deserve punishment. But it's not worth while telling you. I will only tell you about my last trick because that'll please you, I know. I paid him out for you, Papa."

The Abbé looked at his son with terrified eyes and stopped eating.

Philippe-Auguste was going on with his story.

"No," the priest said, "not now, presently."

Turning round, he struck the strident Chinese cymbal and made it cry out.

Marguerite came at once.

Her master gave his orders so harshly that she bowed her head, afraid and docile :

"Bring us the lamp and all that is still to be put on the table ; after that you must not come back unless I strike the gong."

She went out, came back again and put a white china lamp on the table-cloth, a big piece of cheese, and some fruit, and then left the room.

The Abbé said with determination :

"Now I am listening."

Quite undisturbed, Philippe-Auguste filled up his plate with dessert and filled his glass with wine. The second bottle was nearly empty, although the *curé* had not touched it. The young man, his mouth sticky with food and drink, stammering, resumed :

"The last one : well . . . It is pretty bad. I had returned home . . . and I stayed there in spite of them because they were afraid of me . . . afraid of me. . . . Ah ! You must not annoy me. . . . I can do anything when I'm annoyed. . . . You know . . . they were living together and yet not together. He had two homes, he had, one the senator's, the other the lover's. But he lived at mamma's more than he did at his own home, because he could not do without her. Ah ! . . . she was shrewd, she was knowing, mamma . . . she knew how to hold a man, she did ! She had taken him body and soul, and she kept him to the end. What fools men are ! Well, I had returned and I ruled them by fear. I know my way about when it's wanted, and for tricks and dodges, and violence, too, I'm anyone's match. Then mamma fell ill and he settled her in a beautiful place near Meulan in the middle of a park as big as a forest. That lasted about eighteen months . . . as I told you. Then we felt the end coming. He came from Paris every day, he was unhappy, no doubt about it, really unhappy.

"Well, one morning they had been jabbering for nearly an hour, and I was wondering what they could be chattering about so long, when they called me; and mamma said:

" 'I am going to die, and there's something I want to tell you, although the Count doesn't agree'—she always called him the Count when she spoke about him—'it is the name of your father, who is still alive.'

"I had asked for it more than a hundred times . . . more than a hundred times . . . my father's name . . . more than a hundred times . . . and she had always refused to tell me . . . I even think that I hit her one day to make her talk, but it was no use. And then, to get rid of me, she said that you had died penniless, that you were a good-for-nothing, an error of her youth, a maiden's slip, any old thing. She told the story so well that I swallowed it whole, the story of your death.

"So she said to me: 'It is your father's name.' The other, who was sitting in an arm-chair, repeated three times, just like this:

" 'You are wrong, you are wrong, you are wrong, Rosette.'

"Mamma sat up in bed. I can still see her with the red spots on her cheeks and her bright eyes, for she loved me in spite of all; she said to him:

" 'Then do something for him yourself, Philippe.'

"When talking to him she always called him 'Philippe' and me 'Auguste.'

"He started shouting out like a madman:

" 'For that blackguard, never, for that rogue, that jail-bird, that . . . that . . . that . . .'

"He called me all kinds of names just as if he had done nothing else all his life except look for names for me. I nearly lost my temper, Mamma bade me be quiet, and said to him:

“ ‘Do you want him to die of hunger, for I have nothing to give him.’

“ He replied, calm as you please :

“ ‘Rosette, for thirty years I have given you thirty-five thousand francs a year, that makes over a million. Thanks to me you have led the life of a rich woman, a well-loved woman, and, I dare to add, a happy woman. I owe nothing to this blackguard who has spoilt our last years together, and he will get nothing from me. It is no good arguing. Let him know the name of the other one, if you wish. I am sorry, but I wash my hands of the matter.’

“ Then mamma turned towards me. I said to myself : ‘God . . . I am going to get my own father back ; . . . if he has any cash, I am a saved man. . . .’

“ She continued :

“ ‘Your father, the Baron of Vilbois, is now known as the Abbé Vilbois, *curé* of Girandou, near Toulon. He was my lover when I left him for this man.’ She then told me everything except how she had tricked you about her pregnancy. But, there it is, women never tell the truth.”

He sniggered, unconcerned, displaying all his vileness. He went on drinking and, still with a smiling face, continued :

“ Mamma died two days . . . two days later. We followed her coffin to the grave, he and I . . . wasn’t it comical ! . . . eh ! . . . he and I . . . and three servants . . . that was all. He cried like a cow . . . we were side by side . . . you would have said it was papa and papa’s dear boy.

“ Then we went home. Only the two of us. I said to myself : ‘I must be off, without a halfpenny.’ I had just fifty francs. What could I do to pay him out ?

“ He touched my arm and said :

“ ‘I want to speak to you.’

“ I followed him to his study. He sat down before his

table and snivelling and crying, he said he wouldn't treat me as badly as he had told mamma he would ; he begged me not to worry you. . . . But that's our business, yours and mine. . . . He offered me a thousand-franc note . . . a thousand . . . a thousand . . . what could I do with a thousand francs . . . me . . . a man like me ? I saw there were lots more in the drawer, a whole heap. At the sight of all that paper, I felt I wanted to do for someone. I held out my hand to take his gift, but instead of accepting his charity I sprang upon him, threw him down, strangling him until his eyes bulged out, then when I saw he was going to peg out I gagged and trussed him, undressed him and turned him over, then . . . Ha ! . . . Ha ! Ha ! . . . I jolly well paid him out for you ! . . ."

Philippe-Auguste coughed, choking with joy ; and once again the curve of ferocious gaiety on his lips reminded Abbé Vilbois of the smile of the woman over whom he had lost his head.

"Then ?" he said.

"Then . . . Ha ! Ha ! Ha ! . . . There was a big fire in the grate . . . it was December . . . in cold weather . . . she died . . . mamma . . . a big coal fire . . . I took up the poker . . . made it all hot . . . you see . . . I made crosses on his back, eight, ten, I don't know how many, then I turned him over again and made the same number on his belly. Wasn't it funny, eh, Papa ! That is how convicts were marked in the old days. He wriggled like an eel . . . but I had gagged him well, he couldn't cry out. Then I took the notes—twelve of them—with my own that made thirteen . . . but they brought me no luck. Then I made off telling the servants not to disturb the Count until dinner-time, because he was asleep.

"I made sure he would say nothing about it from dread of exposure, as he was a senator. But I was mistaken.

Four days later I was pinched in a Paris restaurant. I got three years in jail. That is why I could not come and see you sooner."

He was still drinking and spluttering and could hardly pronounce one word clearly.

"Now . . . Papa . . . Papa *curé*! Isn't it funny to have a *curé* for a papa! . . . Ha! Ha! must be kind, very kind to the darling boy, because darling boy is out of the common . . . and he played a lovely trick . . . didn't he? . . . a lovely one . . . on the old man. . . ."

The same feeling of rage that had maddened Abbé Vilbois in that final scene with the mistress who had betrayed him, seized him now towards this abominable wretch.

He who, in God's name, had dealt out forgiveness to many shameful secrets whispered in the privacy of the confessional, was pitiless, merciless towards himself, he had ceased to call upon an all-merciful Father to help him, for he understood that no protection from heaven or earth could save anyone afflicted with such misfortune.

All the fire of his passionate heart and of his violent blood, subdued by church discipline, awoke in an irresistible revolt against this wretch, his son, against this likeness to himself, and more to that unworthy mother who had conceived the boy in his own likeness, and against the fatality which had riveted this scoundrel to his paternal foot like the fetters of a galley-slave.

He saw, he foresaw all in a flash of clear-sightedness, roused by this shock from his twenty-five years of pious tranquillity and rest.

Suddenly convinced that he must take a high tone with this criminal, to cow and terrify him at the outset, he said through teeth clenched with anger, forgetting his drunkenness:

"Now that you have told me all, listen. You will go

away to-morrow morning. You will live in a place that I shall choose and you will not leave it without my permission. I will make you an allowance enough to live upon, but small, for I have no money. If you disobey me once, this arrangement will come to an end and I will deal with you. . . ."

Although stupefied by wine, Philippe-Auguste understood the threat, and the criminal within him rose instantly to the surface. Hiccupping, he spat out some words :

"Ah! Papa, no use trying it on me. . . . You are a *curé* . . . I've got you in my power . . . you will take it quietly, like the others."

The Abbé started, the muscles of the old Hercules were aching to seize the bully, to bend him like a reed, and show him that he must submit to authority.

Pushing the table against his son's chest, he shouted :

"Take care, take care. . . . I fear no man, not I."

Losing his balance, the drunkard rocked on his chair, then feeling that he was going to fall and that he was in the priest's power, with a villainous look on his face he stretched out his hand towards a knife that was lying on the cloth. Abbé Vilbois noticed the movement and gave the table a violent push that sent his son head over heels on to the floor, where he lay on his back. The lamp rolled along the ground and went out.

For a few seconds a thin tinkle of glasses jingling against each other sounded through the darkness, then the creeping of a soft body over the stone floor, then silence.

With the crash of the fallen lamp, black night, swift and unexpected, had fallen upon the two, leaving them dazed as in the presence of some unspeakable horror.

The drunkard, crouching against the wall, stirred no more ; the priest remained on his chair, plunged in the blackness of the night that was gradually swallowing up his anger. The veil of darkness thrown over him stayed his anger, cut short

his furious outburst of temper ; other ideas came to him, black and sad as the darkness around him.

Silence reigned, a silence dense as the closed tomb, in which nothing seemed to live or breathe. Not a sound came from without, no sound of wheels in the distance, no sound of a dog barking, not even the rustle of a slight breath of wind among the branches or the tapping of a twig against the walls.

The silence dragged on ; it might have been an hour. Then suddenly the gong rang. It rang as if struck by a single hard stroke, sharp and loud, followed by a curious noise of something dropping and of an overturned chair.

Marguerite, who was listening, rushed to the room, but on opening the door she drew back in terror of the impenetrable darkness. With pounding heart, and trembling all over, she called out in a low voice, panting for breath :

" Your Reverence, your Reverence."

There was no answer, not a sound.

" My God, my God, what have they done, what has happened ? "

She dare not go in nor dared she go back to fetch a light : she longed madly to run away, to escape, to scream, although her limbs shook so violently that she could hardly stand. She repeated :

" Your Reverence, your Reverence, it is I, Marguerite."

Suddenly, in spite of her fear, she felt she must save her master. One of those sudden fits of bravery that occasionally give women strength to perform heroic deeds filled her soul with the recklessness of terror, and running back to the kitchen, she fetched her lamp.

She stopped just inside the room. The first thing she saw was the tramp lying against the wall, asleep or apparently asleep, then the broken lamp, then under the table the black feet and black-stockinged legs of Abbé Vilbois, whose head

must have knocked the gong as he fell over on to his back.

Breathless with fright, her hands trembling, she repeated :
" My God, my God, what is the matter ? "

As she stepped forward slowly, taking small steps, she slipped on something greasy and nearly fell down.

Leaning forward, she saw a red liquid trickling over the red flags and spreading around her feet, and running fast towards the door. She guessed that it was blood.

Mad with terror, she fled, throwing aside the lamp so that she might see nothing more, and rushed through the fields towards the village. She ran, knocking against the trees, with eyes fixed on the distant lights, screaming.

Her shrill cries pierced the night like the sinister call of an owl, and she screamed ceaselessly : " The tramp . . . the tramp . . . the tramp . . . "

When she reached the nearest houses, scared men came out and gathered around her, but she struggled without answering their questions ; she had completely lost her head.

At last they understood that some accident had happened at the *curé's*, and made up a party to go to his rescue.

The little pink-painted house in the middle of the olive orchard had become invisible and black in the deep silent night. Since the one light from the illuminated window had gone out like a closed eye, the house had been drowned in shadow, lost in the darkness, undiscoverable to any but natives of the place.

Soon lights were moving over the ground, through the trees, coming towards it. They threw long, yellow rays on the burnt grass, and under their wavering beams distorted trunks of the olives looked like unreal monsters, like serpents of hell enlaced and writhing. The beams projected in the distance suddenly showed up against something whitish and vague in the darkness, then the low, square wall of the

little house turned pink again in the lantern-light. The lanterns were carried by the peasants, who accompanied two gendarmes with revolvers, the village constable, the mayor of the village, and Marguerite, supported by some of the men, as she was in a state of collapse.

They hesitated for a minute in front of the open, terrifying doorway, but the inspector seized a lantern and entered, followed by the others.

The servant had not lied. The blood, now congealed, spread over the flags like a carpet. It had trickled as far as the tramp, staining one of his legs and one of his hands.

Father and son were asleep. The one with cut throat, slept the everlasting sleep, the other slept the sleep of the drunkard. The two policemen threw themselves upon the latter and had handcuffed him before he awoke. He rubbed his eyes, stupefied, besotted with wine; when he saw the priest's corpse he looked terrified and uncomprehending.

"Why ever did he not run away?" said the Mayor.

"He was too drunk," replied the inspector.

They all agreed with him: it never occurred to anyone that Abbé Vilbois might possibly have killed himself.

MOUCHE

A BOATING MAN'S REMINISCENCE

HE SAID TO US :

"What queer things and queer women I have seen in those old days when I used to go on the river ! Many a time I have longed to write a little book, called 'On the Seine,' describing that athletic, care-free life, gay and penniless, roistering and noisy, that I led from twenty to thirty.

"I was a penniless clerk : now I am a successful man who can throw away big sums of money to gratify a moment's whim. I had a thousand, modest, unattainable desires in my heart, which gilded my existence with all the imaginary hopes in the world. To-day, I don't really know what fancy could make me rise from the arm-chair where I sit nodding. How simple and pleasant, and difficult, it is to live so, between an office in Paris and the river at Argenteuil ! For ten years, my great, my only, my absorbing passion was the Seine. Oh, the lovely, calm, varied and stinking river, filled with mirage and all uncleanness ! I think I loved it so much because it gave me, I think, a sense of life. Oh, the strolls along the flowery banks, my friends the frogs dreaming on a water-lily leaf, their stomachs in the cool, and the frail, dainty water-lilies in the middle of tall fine grasses that all at once, behind a willow, opened to my eyes a leaf from a Japanese album as a kingfisher darted off before me like a blue flame. I loved it all, with an instinctive sight-born love that spread through my body in a deep natural joy.

"As others cherish the memories of tender nights, I

cherish memories of sunrises on misty mornings, floatings, wandering vapours, white as the dead before dawn ; then, when the first ray glided over the meadows, lit with a rosy light that ravished the heart ; memories of a moon that silvered the quivering, running water with a glimmering radiance where all dreams came to life.

“ And all that, symbol of the eternal illusion, was born, for me, from the foul water that drifted all the sewage of Paris down to the sea.

“ And what a gay life we friends led ! There were five of us, a little circle, serious-minded men to-day ; and as we were all poor, we had founded in a frightful pot-house at Argenteuil an indescribable colony that possessed nothing but a dormitory bedroom, where I have spent what were certainly the maddest evenings of my life. We cared for nothing but amusing ourselves and rowing, for we all, with one exception, looked upon rowing as a religion. I remember such singular adventures, such incredible jests invented by those five vagabonds, that no one could believe them to-day. You never get anything like it now, even on the Seine, for the whimsical madness that kept us brimful of life has died out of the modern spirit.

“ We five owned one boat between us, bought with immense effort, over which we have laughed as we shall never laugh again. It was a big yawl, rather heavy, but solid, roomy and comfortable. I won't describe my comrades to you. There was one small, very mischievous fellow, nicknamed Petit Bleu ; a tall fellow, of uncivilised appearance, with grey eyes and black hair, nicknamed Tomahawk ; another, an indolent, witty fellow, nicknamed La Toque, the only one who never touched an oar, on the excuse that he would capsize the boat ; a thin, elegant, very well-groomed young man, nicknamed N'a-qu'un-Œil, in memory of a just-published novel by Claudel, and because he wore

a monocle ; and myself, who was dubbed Joseph Prunier. We lived in perfect harmony, our sole regret being that we had not a steerswoman. A woman is indispensable in a river boat. Indispensable because she keeps wits and hearts awake, because she livens, amuses, distracts, gives a spice to life, and a decorative effect too, with a red sunshade gliding past the green banks. But our steerswoman must be no ordinary one, since we five were like no one else in the world. We wanted something unexpected, uncommon, ready for anything, almost unfindable, in fact. We had tried several without success, girls at the helm, not helmswomen, idiotic river girls who always preferred the thin wine that went to their heads to the running water that bore the yawls. You kept them one Sunday, then dismissed them in disgust.

" But one Saturday evening, N'a-qu'un-Œil brought us a little, slender creature, lively, quick on her feet, loose-tongued and full of jokes, the jokes that pass for wit among the jackanapes, male and female, hatched on the side-walks of Paris. She was pleasant-looking, not pretty, a mere sketch of a woman that had got no farther, one of those silhouettes that draughtsmen pencil in three strokes on a napkin in a restaurant after dinner, between a glass of brandy and a cigarette. Nature makes them like that sometimes.

" The first evening, she astonished and amused us, and was so unexpected in her ways that we couldn't decide about her. Dropped into this nest of men, who were ready for any mad prank, she quickly made herself mistress of the situation, and with the next day, she had conquered us.

" She was, moreover, quite crazy, born with a glass of absinthe in her stomach, that her mother had drunk when she was brought to bed, and she had never got sober since, for her nurse, she said, enriched her blood with draughts of rum ; and she herself never called all the bottles ranged

behind the wine merchant's counter by any other name than 'my holy family.'

"I don't know which of us christened her 'Mouche,' nor why this name was given her, but it suited her very well, and stuck to her. And our yawl, which was called *Feuille-d-l'Envers*, bore on the Seine every week, between Asnières and Maisons-Lafitte, five youngsters, happy and healthy, ruled from under a painted paper parasol by a lively, madcap young person who treated us as if we were slaves whose duty was to take her on the river, and whom we adored.

"We adored her, at first, for a thousand reasons, and afterwards for only one. She was a sort of little mill of talk in the stern of our craft, chattering to the wind that slipped over the water. She babbled endlessly, with the light, continuous sound of those mechanical wings that turn in the breeze; and she blurted out the most unexpected, the most ridiculous and the most amazing things. In her mind, all the parts of which seemed disparate like rags of all kinds and colours, not sewn together but only tacked, there was fantasy like a fairy-tale, smut, effrontery, impudence, incongruity, humour, and air—air and scenery like travelling in a balloon.

"We used to ask her questions to provoke unexpected answers. The one with which we most often worried her was this:

" 'Why are you called Mouche?'

"She produced such fantastic reasons that we stopped rowing to laugh.

"We liked her as a woman, too; and La Toque, who never rowed, and spent the whole day seated at her side in the cox's seat, one day answered the usual question: 'Why are you called Mouche?' by saying:

" 'Because she's a little blister-fly.'

"Yes, a little, buzzing, fever-bearing cantharis, not the classic poisoned cantharis, gleaming and sheathed, but a

little, red-winged cantharis who was beginning to trouble the entire crew of the *Feuille-à-l'Envers* strangely.

"What senseless jests were perpetrated, though, on the leaf where this Mouche had alighted !

"Since Mouche arrived in the boat, N'a-qu'un-Œil had assumed a superior and preponderant rôle among us, the rôle of a gentleman who has a woman among four others who have not. He abused this privilege sometimes to the point of exasperating us by embracing Mouche under our eyes, seating her on his knees at the end of a meal, and by various other prerogatives as humiliating as irritating.

"We had made a separate place for them in the dormitory by a curtain.

"But I soon realised that my companions and I must be turning over the same arguments in our bachelor heads : 'Why, by virtue of what law of exceptions, on what inadmissible principle, should Mouche, who appeared unembarrassed by any sort of prejudice, be faithful to her lover when women of better classes were not faithful to their husbands ?'

"Our reflection was justified. We were soon convinced. We only ought to have done it earlier, and we should have had no regrets for lost time. Mouche betrayed N'a-qu'un-Œil with all the other sailors of the *Feuille-à-l'Envers*.

"She betrayed him without objections, without resistance, at the first request from each of us.

"I suppose prudes will be terribly shocked. Why ? What fashionable courtesan has not a dozen lovers, and which of those lovers is stupid enough not to know it ? Is it not the fashion to spend an evening with a celebrated and sought-after woman, as one spends an evening at the Opéra, at the Français or the Odéon, because they are playing the minor classics there ? Ten men combine together to keep a *cocotte* who shares out her time grudgingly, as they club

together to own a racehorse whom no one rides but a jockey, the equivalent of the *amant de cœur*.

"From motives of delicacy, we left Mouche to N'a-qu'un-Œil from Saturday evening to Monday morning. The days on the river were his. We only betrayed him during the week, in Paris, far from the Seine, which, for rowing men like us, was almost no betrayal at all.

"The situation was peculiar in this one way, that the four robbers of Mouche's favours were fully aware of the way they were shared out, and talked about it among themselves, and even to her, in veiled allusions that made her laugh heartily. Only N'a-qu'un-Œil seemed to know nothing about it; and this special position produced a certain awkwardness between him and us; it seemed to set him apart, isolate him, raise a barrier across our old confidence and our old intimacy. It gave him in our eyes a difficult and rather ridiculous part to play, the part of deceived lover, almost the part of husband.

"As he was very intelligent, and possessed of a peculiarly sly wit, we sometimes wondered, not without a certain uneasiness, whether he had not his suspicions.

"He took care to enlighten us in a fashion that was very painful for us. We were going to dine at Bougival, and we were rowing vigorously, when La Toque, who wore that morning the triumphant aspect of a satisfied man and, sitting side by side with the steerswoman, seemed to be pressing himself against her a little too freely in our opinion, halted the rowing, crying: 'Stop.'

"Eight oars were lifted out of the water.

"Then, turning to his neighbour, he demanded:

" 'Why are you called Mouche?'

"Before she could reply, the voice of N'a-qu'un-Œil, seated in the bows, observed dryly:

" 'Because she settles on every sort of carrion.'

" There was profound silence at first, and a sense of embarrassment followed by a wish to laugh. Mouche herself was taken quite aback.

" Then La Toque ordered :

" ' All together.'

" The boat shot forward again.

" The incident was closed, the air cleared.

" This little adventure occasioned no change in our habits. Its only effect was to re-establish the cordiality between N'a-qu'un-Œil and ourselves. He became once more the honoured proprietor of Mouche, from Saturday evening to Monday morning, his superiority over us having been firmly established by this definition, which closed, moreover, the era of questions about the word ' Mouche.' We contented ourselves for the future with the secondary rôle of grateful and attentive friends who profited discreetly on week-days, without any sort of competition among us.

" Everything went very well for about three months. But all at once Mouche adopted, towards all of us, strange attitudes. She was less gay, nervy, ill at ease, almost irritable. We were continually asking her :

" ' What's the matter with you ? '

" She answered :

" ' Nothing. Leave me alone.'

" The truth was revealed to us by N'a-qu'un-Œil one Saturday evening. We had just sat down to table in the little dining-room that the proprietor of our pot-house reserved for us in his wayside inn, and, soup over, we were waiting for the fried fish, when our friend, who also seemed anxious, first took Mouche's hand, and then spoke :

" ' My dear comrades,' said he, ' I have a very grave communication to make to you, which will perhaps occasion lengthy discussions. We shall have time, however, to argue between the courses. Our poor Mouche has announced a

disastrous piece of news to me, bidding me at the same time to pass it on to you.

“ ‘She is *enceinte*.’

“ ‘I add only two words.’

“ ‘This is no time to desert her, and any attempt to settle the paternity is forbidden.’

“The first effect of this news was blank amazement, a sense of disaster; and we looked at one another, feeling a desire to accuse someone. But whom? Oh, whom? I have never felt, so sharply as in that moment, how treacherous is this cruel jest of Nature that never allows a man to know beyond shadow of doubt whether he is the father of his child.

“Then, gradually, we experienced a certain sense of comfort and consolation, born, in compensation, from a vague feeling of solidarity.

“Tomahawk, who spoke little, expressed this dawning serenity by these words:

“ ‘Well, well, union is strength.’

“The gudgeon came in, borne by a scullion. We did not fling ourselves on it, as was our custom, because we were still disturbed.

“N’a-qu’un-Æil went on:

“ ‘In these circumstances, she has had the delicacy to make full confession to me. My friends, we are all equally guilty. Give me your hands and let us adopt the child.’

“The decision was carried unanimously. We lifted our arms towards the dish of fried fish and took the oath.

“ ‘We will adopt it.’

“At that, in that moment, saved, delivered from the dreadful weight of anxiety which for a month had been torturing this dear, wanton little waif of love, Mouche cried:

“ ‘Oh, my friends, my friends! You are so kind . . . so kind . . . so kind. . . . Thank you all!’

“And she wept, for the first time, in our sight.

"Henceforth we talked in the boat about the child as if it were already born, and each of us showed an interest, with an exaggerated air of anxious concern, in the slow, regular change in our steerswoman's figure.

"We stopped rowing to ask :

" ' Mouche ? ' "

" She replied :

" ' Here, sir. ' "

" ' Boy or girl ? ' "

" ' Boy. ' "

" ' What will he be ? ' "

"Then she let her imagination take flight in the most fantastic fashion. She gave us interminable narratives, amazing inventions, stretching from the day of his birth to his final triumph. He was everything, this child, to the artless, passionate, loving dreams of this extraordinary little creature who now lived chaste among us five men, whom she called her ' five papas. ' She saw and described him as a sailor, discovering a new world greater than America, a general, regaining Alsace-Lorraine for France, then an emperor, founding a dynasty of wise and generous sovereigns who gave our country lasting happiness, then a scientist, first discovering the secret of making gold, then that of eternal life, then an aeronaut, inventing means to visit the stars and making of infinite space a vast playground for men, the realisation of all the most unforeseen and most magnificent dreams.

"Ah ! How gay and amusing she was, poor little thing, until the end of the summer !

"It was the twentieth of September that destroyed her dream. We had been lunching at Maison-Lafitte, and we were passing Saint-Germain, when she felt thirsty and asked us to stop at Pecq.

"For some time now, she had been growing heavy, and

this annoyed her very much. She could no longer leap about as before, nor jump from the boat to the bank, as she was used to doing. She still tried, in spite of our cries and our efforts ; and twenty times, but for our arms outstretched to catch her, she would have fallen.

" This particular day, filled with just such bravado as sometimes proves fatal to athletes who are ill or tired, she was rash enough to try to get on shore before the boat stopped.

" Just as we were drawing alongside, before any of us could foresee or prevent her movement, she stood up, made a spring, and tried to jump on to the quay.

" She was too weak, and only the top of her foot touched the edge of the stone quay ; she slipped, hit her stomach full on the sharp corner, gave a loud cry, and disappeared in the water.

" The whole five of us plunged in together, and brought out a poor swooning creature, pale as death, and already suffering frightful pains.

" We had to carry her without delay to the nearest inn, where a doctor was called.

" Throughout the ten hours during which her premature labour lasted, she bore her abominable torture with heroic courage. We were standing miserably round her, on fever with grief and fear.

" Then she was delivered of a dead child ; and for some days more we had the gravest fears for her life.

" At last one morning the doctor said to us : ' I think she is safe. She's made of steel, that girl.' And we entered her room together with glad hearts.

" N'a-qu'un-Œil, speaking for all of us, said to her :

" ' You're out of danger, little Mouche, and we're very happy.'

" Then she cried in front of us for the second time, and, her eyes swimming in tears, she stammered :

“ ‘ Oh, if you knew, if you knew . . . how unhappy . . . how unhappy I am ! . . . I shall never be comforted.’ ”

“ ‘ But why, little Mouche ? ’ ”

“ ‘ Because I killed him, I killed him ! Oh, I never meant to ! How unhappy I am ! ’ ”

“ She sobbed. We stood round her, very upset, not knowing what to say to her.

“ She went on :

“ ‘ Did you see him ? ’ ”

“ With one voice we answered :

“ ‘ Yes.’ ”

“ ‘ It was a boy, wasn’t it ? ’ ”

“ ‘ Yes.’ ”

“ ‘ He was beautiful, wasn’t he ? ’ ”

“ We hesitated. Petit-Bleu, the least scrupulous of us, decided to affirm :

“ ‘ Very beautiful.’ ”

“ He was ill-advised, for she began moaning, almost shrieking with despair.

“ Then N’a-qu’un-Œil, who perhaps loved her more than any of us, had a brilliant idea to quiet her, and kissing her tear-stained eyes, said :

“ ‘ Cheer up, little Mouche, cheer up, we’ll make you another one.’ ”

“ The sense of humour that was bred in her bones woke suddenly, and half convinced, half joking, still all tears and her heart contracted with pain, she asked, looking at all of us :

“ ‘ Promise ? ’ ”

“ And we answered together :

“ ‘ Promise.’ ”

THE DROWNED MAN

I

EVERY ONE IN FÉCAMP KNEW THE STORY OF OLD MOTHER Patin. She had undoubtedly been unhappy with her man, had old Mother Patin ; for her man had beaten her during his lifetime, as a man threshes wheat in his barns.

He was owner of a fishing-smack, and had married her long ago, because she was nice, although she was poor.

Patin, a good seaman, but a brute, frequented old Auban's tavern, where, on ordinary days, he drank four or five brandies, and on days when he had made a good catch, eight or ten, and even more, according how he felt, as he said.

The brandy was served to customers by old Auban's daughter, a pleasant-faced, dark-haired girl, who drew custom to the house merely by her good looks, for no one had ever wagged a tongue against her.

When Patin entered the tavern, he was content to look at her and talk civilly to her, quiet, decent conversation. When he had drunk the first brandy, already he found her nicer ; at the second, he was winking at her ; at the third, he was saying : " Miss Désirée, if you would only . . ." without ever finishing the sentence ; at the fourth, he was trying to hold her by her petticoat to embrace her ; and when he had reached the tenth, it was old Auban who served him with the rest.

The old wine-seller, who knew every trick of the trade, used to send Désirée round between the tables to liven up

the orders for drinks ; and Désirée, who was not old Auban's daughter for nothing, paraded her petticoat among the drinkers and bandied jests, with a smile on her lips, and a twinkle in her eye.

By dint of drinking brandies, Patin grew so familiar with Désirée's face that he thought of it even at sea, when he threw his nets into the water, out on the open sea, on windy nights and calm nights, on moonlit nights and black nights. He thought of it as he held the helm in the stern of his boat, while his four companions slept with their heads on their arms. He saw her always smiling at him, pouring out the yellow brandy with a lift of her shoulders, then coming towards him, saying :

" There ! Is this what you want ? "

And by dint of treasuring her so in eye and mind, he reached such a pitch of longing to marry her that, unable to restrain himself longer, he asked her in marriage.

He was rich, owner of his boat, his nets and a house at the foot of the cliff, on the Retenue ; while old Auban had nothing. He was, therefore, accepted eagerly, and the wedding took place as quickly as possible, both parties being, for different reasons, anxious to make it an accomplished fact.

But three days after the marriage was over, Patin was no longer able to imagine in the least how he had come to think Désirée different from other women. He must have been a rare fool to hamper himself with a penniless girl who had wheedled him with her cognac, so she had, with the cognac into which she had put some filthy drug for him.

And he went cursing along the shore, breaking his pipe between his teeth, swearing at his tackle ; and having cursed heartily, with every term he could think of, everything he knew, he spat out the anger still left in his stomach on the fish and crabs that he drew one by one out of his nets,

throwing them into the baskets to an accompaniment of oaths and foul words.

Then, returning to his house, where he had his wife, old Auban's daughter, within reach of his tongue and his hand, he soon began to treat her as the lowest of the low. Then, as she listened resignedly, being used to the paternal violence, he became exasperated by her calm, and one evening he beat her. After this, his home became a place of terror.

For ten years, nothing was talked of on the Retenue but the beatings Patin inflicted on his wife, and his habit of cursing when he spoke to her, whatever the occasion. He cursed, in fact, in a unique way, with a wealth of vocabulary and a forceful vigour of delivery possessed by no other man in Fécamp. As soon as his boat reached the harbour mouth, back from fishing, they waited expectantly for the first broadside he would discharge on the pier, from his deck, the moment he saw the white bonnet of his other half.

Standing in the stern, he tacked, his glance fixed ahead and on the sheets when the sea was running high, and in spite of the close attention required by the narrow, difficult passage, in spite of the great waves running mountain-high in the narrow gully, he endeavoured to pick out—from the midst of the women waiting in the spray of the breakers for the sailors—his woman, old Auban's daughter, the pauper wench.

Then, as soon as he saw her, in spite of the clamour of waves and wind, he poured on her a volley of abuse with such vocal energy that every one laughed at it, although they pitied her deeply. Then, when his boat reached the quay, he had a way of discharging his ballast of civilities, as he said, while he unloaded his fish, which attracted round him all the rascals and idlers of the harbour.

It issued from his mouth, now like cannon-shots, terrible and short, now like thunderclaps that rolled for five minutes,

such a tempest of oaths that he seemed to have in his lungs all the storms of the Eternal Father.

Then, when he had left his boat, and met among the curious spectators and fishwives, he fished up again from the bottom of the hold a fresh cargo of insults and hard words, and escorted her in such fashion to their home, she in front, he behind, she weeping, he shouting.

Then, alone with her, doors shut, he beat her on the least pretext. Anything was enough to make him lift his hand, and once he had begun, he never stopped, spitting in her face, all the time, the real causes of his hate. At each blow, at each thump, he yelled: "Oh, you penniless slut, oh, you gutter-snipe, oh, you miserable starveling, I did a fine thing the day I washed my mouth out with the fire-water of your scoundrel of a father."

She passed her days now, poor woman, in a state of incessant terror, in a continuous trembling of soul and of body, in stunned expectation of insults and thrashings.

And this lasted for ten years. She was so broken that she turned pale when she talked to anyone, no matter who, and no longer thought of anything but the beatings that threatened her, and she had grown as skinny, yellow and dried up as a smoked fish.

II

One night when her man was at sea she was awakened by the noise like the growling of a beast which the wind makes when it gets up, like an unleashed hound. She sat up in bed, uneasy, then, hearing nothing more, lay down again; but almost at once, there was a moaning in the chimney that shook the whole house and ran across the whole sky

as if a pack of furious animals had crossed the empty spaces panting and bellowing.

Then she got up and ran to the harbour. Other women were running from all sides with lanterns. Men ran up and every one watched the foam flashing white in the darkness on the crest of the waves out at sea.

The storm lasted fifteen hours. Eleven sailors returned no more, and Patin was among them.

The wreckage of his boat, the *Jeune-Amélie*, was recovered off Dieppe. Near Saint-Valéry, they picked up the bodies of his sailors, but his body was never found. As the hull of the small craft had been cut in two, his wife for a long time expected and dreaded his return; for if there had been a collision, it might have happened that the colliding vessel had taken him on board, and carried him to a distant country.

Then, slowly, she grew used to the thought that she was a widow, even though she trembled every time that a neighbour or a beggar or a tramping pedlar entered her house abruptly.

One afternoon, almost four years after the disappearance of her man, she stopped, on her way along the Rue aux Juifs before the house of an old captain who had died recently, and whose belongings were being sold.

Just at that moment, they were auctioning a parrot, a green parrot with a blue head, which was regarding the crowd with a discontented and uneasy air.

"Three francs," cried the auctioneer, "a bird that talks like a lawyer, three francs."

A friend of Widow Patin jogged her elbow.

"You ought to buy that, you're rich," she said. "It would be company for you; he is worth more than thirty francs, that bird. You can always sell him again for twenty to twenty-five easy."

"Four francs, ladies, four francs," the man repeated.

"He sings vespers and preaches like the priest. He's a phenomenon . . . a miracle!"

Widow Patin raised the bid by fifty centimes, and they handed her the hook-nosed creature in a little cage and she carried him off.

Then she installed him in her house, and as she was opening the iron-wire door to give the creature a drink, she got a bite on the finger that broke the skin and drew blood.

"Oh, the wicked bird," said she.

However, she presented him with hemp-seed and maize, then left him smoothing his feathers while he peered with a malicious air at his new home and his new mistress.

Next morning day was beginning to break, when widow Patin heard, with great distinctness, a loud, resonant, rolling voice, Patin's voice, shouting: "Get up, slut."

Her terror was such that she hid her head under the bed-clothes, for every morning, in the old days, as soon as he had opened his eyes, her dead husband shouted in her ears those three familiar words.

Trembling, huddled into a ball, her back turned to the thrashing that she was momentarily expecting, she murmured, her face hidden in the bed:

"God Almighty, he's here! God Almighty, he's here! He's come back, God Almighty!"

Minutes passed; no other sound broke the silence of her room. Then, shuddering, she lifted her head from the bed, sure that he was there, spying on her, ready to strike.

She saw nothing, nothing but a ray of sun falling across the window-pane, and she thought:

"He's hiding, for sure."

She waited a long time, then, a little reassured, thought:

"I must have been dreaming, seeing he doesn't show himself."

She was shutting her eyes again, a little reassured, when

right in her ears the furious voice burst out, the thunderous voice of her drowned man, shouting :

“Damn and blast it, get up, you bitch.”

She leaped out of bed, jerked out by her instinctive obedience, the passive obedience of a woman broken in by blows, who still remembers, after four years, and will always remember, and always obey that voice. And she said :

“Here I am, Patin. What do you want ?”

But Patin did not answer.

Then, bewildered, she looked round her, and searched everywhere, in the cupboards, in the chimney, under the bed, still finding no one, and at last let herself fall into a chair, distracted with misery, convinced that the spirit of Patin itself was there, near her, come back to torture her.

Suddenly, she remembered the loft, which could be reached from outside by a ladder. He had certainly hidden himself there to take her by surprise. He must have been kept by savages on some shore, unable to escape sooner, and he had come back, more wicked than ever. She could not doubt it ; the mere tone of his voice convinced her.

She asked, her head turned towards the ceiling :

“Are you up there, Patin ?”

Patin did not answer.

Then she went out, and in an unutterable terror that set her heart beating madly, she climbed the ladder, opened the garret window, looked in, saw nothing, entered, searched, and found nothing.

Seated on a truss of hay, she began to cry ; but while she was sobbing, shaken by an acute and supernatural terror, she heard, in the room below her, Patin telling his story. He seemed less angry, calmer, and he was saying :

“Filthy weather . . . high wind . . . filthy weather. I’ve had no breakfast, damn it.”

She called through the ceiling :

"I'm here, Patin; I'll make you some soup. Don't be angry. I'm coming."

She climbed down at a run.

There was no one in her house.

She felt her body giving way as if Death had his hand on her, and she was going to run out to ask help from the neighbours, when just in her ear the voice cried:

"I've had no breakfast, damn it."

The parrot, in his cage, was watching her with his round, malicious, wicked eye.

She stared back at him, in amazement, murmuring:

"Oh, it's you."

He answered, shaking his head:

"Wait, wait, wait, I'll teach you to idle."

What were her thoughts? She felt, she realised that this was none other than the dead man, who had returned and hidden himself in the feathers of this creature, to begin tormenting her again, that he was going to swear, as of old, all day, and find fault with her, and shout insults to attract their neighbours' attention and make them laugh. Then she flung herself across the room, opened the cage, seized the bird, who defended himself and tore her skin with his beak and his claws. But she held him with all her might, in both hands, and throwing herself on the ground, rolled on top of him with mad frenzy, crushed him, made of him a mere rag of flesh, a little, soft, green thing that no longer moved or spoke, and hung limp. Then, wrapping him in a dish-cloth as a shroud, she went out, in her shift, bare-footed, crossed the quay, against which the sea was breaking in small waves, and shaking the cloth, let fall this small, green thing that looked like a handful of grass. Then she returned, threw herself on her knees before the empty cage, and utterly overcome by what she had done, she asked pardon of the good God, sobbing, as if she had just committed a horrible crime.

THE TEST

I

A PLEASANT COUPLE, THE BONDELS, THOUGH A LITTLE bellicose. They often quarrelled for trivial reasons and then made it up.

A retired tradesman who had given up business after amassing enough to live on in accordance with his simple tastes, Bondel had rented a little cottage at Saint-Germain, and settled down there with his wife.

He was a placid-natured man, whose firmly-rooted ideas reorientated themselves with difficulty. He had some education, read the more serious papers and yet appreciated a broad joke. Gifted with reason, logic, and the practical good sense that is the supreme quality of the hard-working French bourgeois, his thoughts were few but sure, and he made resolutions only on grounds that his instinct assured him to be infallible.

He was a man of middle height and distinguished appearance, and was going a little grey.

His wife, endowed with real qualities, had also some faults. Of a passionate nature, with a frankness of bearing that bordered on the violent, and obstinate to a degree, she cherished undying resentments against people. Once a pretty woman, she had become too plump and too highly coloured, but she passed even now, in their circle at Saint-Germain, for a very pretty woman, though rather vulgarly healthy.

Their disputes almost always began at lunch, in the course

of some quite unimportant discussion, and then they remained estranged until the evening, often until the next day. Their life, simple and limited as it was, lent a gravity to their lightest concerns, and every subject of conversation became a subject of dispute. It had not been so in other days, when they had a business that absorbed them, joined them in mutual anxieties, gripped their hearts, confined and imprisoned them both in bonds of partnership and a common interest.

But at Saint-Germain they saw fewer people. It had been necessary to make new friends, to build for themselves, in a society of strangers, a new and wholly unoccupied life. Then the monotony of hours that were all alike had made them a little bitter against each other, and the peaceful happiness for which they had hoped and had expected leisure to bring them, did not materialise.

They had just sat down to the table one June morning, when Bondel asked :

"Do you know the people who live in the little red cottage at the end of the Rue de Berceau?"

Mme Bondel must have got out of bed on the wrong side. She replied :

"Yes and no. I know them by sight, but I don't care to know them."

"But why? They look very pleasant."

"Because. . . ."

"I met the husband this morning on the terrace and we took a couple of turns together."

Realising that there was danger in the air, Bondel added :

"It was he who accosted me and spoke first."

His wife regarded him with displeasure. She replied :

"You'd have done well to avoid him."

"But why?"

"Because people are talking about them."

"Talking! Good heavens, people are always talking."

M. Bondel, foolishly, spoke a little strongly:

"My dearest, you know that I have a horror of talk. The fact that they are being talked about is enough to make me take a liking to people. For my part, I find these people very pleasant."

She asked furiously:

"The wife too, I suppose?"

"Well, yes, the wife too, although I've hardly seen her."

And the argument went on, becoming slowly more and more venomous, implacably fastened on one subject from sheer lack of other interests.

Mme Bondel obstinately refused to say what sort of talk was going the rounds about these neighbours, leaving it to be understood that quite dreadful things, which she did not specify, were being said. Bondel shrugged his shoulders, sneered, exasperated his wife. She ended by shouting:

"Well, your gentleman is a cuckold, there!"

Her husband answered unemotionally:

"I don't see in what way that affects a man's good name."

She seemed stupefied.

"What, you don't see it? . . . you don't see it? . . . upon my word, that's too much . . . you don't see it? But it's a public scandal: he's a dishonoured cuckold!"

He answered:

"Not at all. Is a man dishonoured because he's deceived. dishonoured because he's betrayed, dishonoured because he's robbed? . . . Not at all. I agree with you as regards his wife, but as for him. . . ."

She became furious.

"He's as much in it as she. They're dishonoured, it's a public scandal."

Bondel, very calm, asked:

"Firstly, is it true? Who can assert such a thing, short of taking them in the act?"

Mme Bondel bounced in her chair.

"What? Who can assert it? Why, every one! every one! A thing like that is as plain as the nose on your face. Every one knows it, every one talks about it. There's no question about it. It's as well known as a public holiday."

He sneered.

"And for a long time people believed that the sun moved round the earth, and a thousand other equally well-known things, which were untrue. This man adores his wife; he talks about her with affection and respect. It's not true."

She stammered, stamping her foot:

"Considering that he knows all about it, the fool, the idiot, the dishonoured brute!"

Bondel did not lose his temper; he argued:

"Pardon me. The man is no fool. He seemed to me, on the contrary, exceptionally intelligent and very acute; and you won't make me believe that an intelligent man would not notice such a thing in his house when his neighbours, who are not there, are conversant with every detail of this adultery, for I'll warrant they are conversant with every detail."

Mme Bondel gave way to a spasm of angry mirth that jarred her husband's nerves.

"Oh! oh! oh! You're all alike, all of you! As if there was a single man in the world who would find it out, unless his nose was rubbed in it."

The discussion took another turn. She became heated on the question of the blindness of deceived husbands, which he called in doubt and she asserted with an air of such personal scorn that he finally lost his temper.

The quarrel became a violent one in which she took the side of women and he defended men.

He had the folly to declare :

"Well, I take my oath that if I had been deceived, I should have seen it, and at once too. And I would have cured you of your fancy in such a fashion that it would have needed more than a doctor to put you on your feet again."

She was transported with rage and shouted in his face :

"You? You! Why, you're as stupid as any of them, do you hear?"

He asserted again :

"I take my oath I'm not."

She burst into so impudent a laugh that he felt his pulses quicken and his skin creep.

For the third time, he said :

"I should have seen it!"

She got up, still laughing in the same way.

"No, it's too much," she got out.

And she went out, slamming the door.

II

Bondel remained alone, ill at ease. That insolent, provocative laughter had affected him like the sting of one of those venomous flies which we do not feel at first, but soon begin to smart and hurt intolerably.

He went out, and walked about, brooding. The solitary nature of his new life disposed him to unhappy, even gloomy, thoughts. The neighbour whom he had met that morning suddenly approached him. They shook hands and began to talk. After touching on various subjects, they began to talk about their wives. Each of them seemed to have something to confide, some inexpressible, vague and painful

thing concerning the very nature of this creature associated with his life : a woman.

The neighbour said :

" You know, one would really think that women sometimes feel a kind of peculiar hostility against their husbands for no other reason than that they are their husbands. Take me. I love my wife. I love her dearly. I appreciate her and respect her. Well, she sometimes seems to feel more at home and intimate with our friends than with me."

Bondel thought at once : " There you are, my wife was right."

When he had parted from the man, he began thinking again. He was conscious of a confused medley of contradictory thoughts in his mind, a sort of unhappy agitation, and his ear still rang with that impudent laughter, that exasperated laughter that seemed to say : " You're in the same boat as the others, you fool." It was certainly a gesture of defiance, one of those insolent gestures typical of women, who will venture anything, take any risk, to wound and humiliate the man against whom they are irritated.

So that poor fellow must be a deceived husband, too, like so many others. He had said wistfully : " She sometimes seems to feel more at home and intimate with our friends than with me." It showed how a husband—the blind sentiment that the law calls a husband—formulated his reflections on the particular attentions his wife shows another man. That was all. He had seen nothing more. He was like all the rest. . . . All the rest !

Then, that strange laugh of Bondel's own wife : " You too . . . you too." The mad imprudence of these creatures who could put such suspicions into a man's heart for sheer pleasure in defying him !

He thought back over their life together, trying to remember whether, in their former relationship, she had ever

seemed more at home and intimate with anyone else than with him. He had never suspected anyone, so placid he had been, sure of her, trustful. Yes, she had had a friend, an intimate friend, who had dined with them three times a week for nearly a year, Tancret, good honest Tancret, whom he, Bondel, loved like a brother, and he continued to see in secret since the time when his wife, for some unexplained reason, had fallen out with the pleasant fellow.

He stood still to think about it, staring into the past with uneasy eyes. Then he suffered an inward revulsion against himself, against this shameful insinuation put forward by the defiant, jealous, malicious self that lies buried in all of us. He blamed himself, accused and insulted himself, even while he was recalling all the visits and the behaviour of this friend whom his wife had valued so highly, and had expelled for no grave reason. But abruptly other memories came to him, of similar ruptures due to the vindictive nature of Mme Bondel, who never forgave an affront. Thereupon he laughed frankly at himself, and at the pricks of anguish that had assailed him; and remembering his wife's malignant expression when on his return in the evenings he remarked to her: "I met old Tancret, and he asked me for news of you," he was completely reassured.

She always replied: "When you see the gentleman, you can tell him that I do not trouble to concern myself with him." Oh, with what an air of irritation and vindictive fury she used to utter these words! How obvious it was that she did not forgive, would not forgive! . . . And he had found it possible to suspect? even for a second? God, what a fool he was!

But why was she so vindictive? She had never told him the exact starting-point of this quarrel, and the reason for her resentment. She owed him a rare grudge, a rare grudge! Could it be? . . . But no—no. . . . And Bondel

declared that he was degrading himself by thinking of such things.

Yes, there was not the least doubt that he was degrading himself, but he could not refrain from thinking about it, and he asked himself in terror whether this thought that had come into his mind was not going to stay there, whether in this thought he had not admitted to his heart the germ of an abiding torture. He knew himself: he was the sort of man who would brood over his doubt, as he had formerly brooded over his commercial transactions for days and nights, weighing pros and cons, interminably.

Already he was becoming agitated, quickening his step and losing his peace of mind. No one can fight against Thought. It is impregnable, it can neither be cast out nor killed.

And abruptly he conceived a plan, an audacious plan, so audacious that he doubted at first whether he could carry it out.

Each time that he met Tancrét, the latter demanded news of Mme Bondel; and Bondel answered: "She's still a little annoyed." That was all. God! . . . had he himself been the typical husband? Perhaps. . . .

He would take the train to Paris, go and see Tancrét, and bring him home with him this very evening, assuring him that his wife's inexplicable resentment was over. Yes, but what a state Mme Bondel would be in . . . what a scene! what fury! . . . what a scandal! Never mind . . . it would be a rare revenge, and seeing them suddenly face to face, she altogether unprepared, he would easily be able to read the truth in the emotions written on their faces.

III

He went to the station at once, took his ticket, climbed into a carriage and when he felt himself being swept along

by the train as it ran down hill at Pecq, he felt a stab of fear, a sort of giddiness at the thought of his audacity. To keep himself from weakening, from backing out of it and returning alone, he strove to give up thinking about it, to seek distraction in other thoughts, to do what he had planned to do with a blind determination, and he set himself to hum songs from the operettas and the music-halls all the way to Paris, to stifle his thoughts.

As soon as he saw before him the pavements that would lead him to Tancret's street, he felt a desire to stop. He loitered in front of several shops, priced some of the objects for sale, took an interest in the novelties, was seized with a desire to drink a bock, which he ordinarily never did, and as he approached his friend's house, hoped earnestly that he would not find him.

But Tancret was at home, alone, reading. He jumped up in surprise, crying :

" Ah ! Bondel ! What luck ! "

And Bondel, embarrassed, answered :

" Yes, old man, I came to do a little business in Paris and I came along just to see how you were. "

" That's good of you, very good of you. All the more so because you've rather lost the habit of coming to see me. "

" Well, what could I do ? There are certain kinds of pressure you can't resist, and as my wife seemed to be annoyed with you. . . . "

" Damn it . . . seemed to be annoyed . . . she went farther than that, seeing that she turned me out of the house. "

" But what was it all about ? I myself have never known that. "

" Oh, nothing ! . . . a silly affair . . . a discussion in which I disagreed with her. "

" But what was the discussion about ? "

"About a lady whom you may know by name; Mme Boutin, a friend of mine."

"Indeed! Well, I believe my wife is tired of it now, for she spoke to me about you this morning in the friendliest possible terms."

Tancret started violently, and seemed so astounded that for some instants he found nothing to say. Then he replied:

"She spoke to you about me . . . in friendly terms?"

"Of course."

"You're sure of it?"

"Bless my soul . . . I'm not given to day-dreams."

"Well?"

"Well . . . as I was coming to Paris, I thought it would please you to hear about it."

"Of course . . . of course."

Bondel seemed to hesitate; then, after a brief silence:

"I even had an idea . . . an original idea."

"What was it?"

"To take you back with me to dine at home."

At this suggestion, Tancret, who was temperamentally cautious, seemed uneasy.

"Oh, do you think . . . is it possible . . . aren't we risking . . . scenes?"

"Not at all . . . not at all."

"Only . . . you know . . . Madame Bondel has a long memory."

"Yes, but I assure you that she's tired of it now. I am quite convinced that it would give her great pleasure to see you like that, unexpectedly."

"Really?"

"Yes, really."

"Well, come along, old man. I'm only too delighted. Believe me, this tiff was very painful to me."

And they set off towards the Gare Saint-Lazare arm-in-arm.

The journey was made in silence. Both seemed lost in profound reveries. Seated facing one another in the carriage, they looked at each other without talking, each observing that the other was pale.

Then they left the train and took each other by the arm again, as if they were standing together against a common danger. After a few minutes' walking, they halted, both a little out of breath, before Bondel's house.

Bondel ushered his friend in, followed him into the drawing-room, called the maid, and said to her :

"Is your mistress at home?"

"Yes, sir."

"Ask her to come down at once, please."

They sank into two arm-chairs and waited, filled now by a common longing to get away as quickly as ever possible, before the dreaded personage appeared in the doorway.

A familiar tread, a firm tread, was descending the steps of the staircase. A hand touched the lock, and the eyes of both men saw the copper handle turning. Then the door opened wide, and Mme Bondel stood still, with the intention of seeing who was there before coming in.

Then she stared, blushed, trembled, recoiled half a step, and then remained motionless with flaming cheeks and hands pressed against the wall at each side of the doorway.

Tancret, now as pale as if he were going to faint, rose, dropping his hat, which rolled across the floor. He stammered :

"Heavens. . . . Madame. . . . It's I. . . . I thought . . . I ventured . . . I was so unhappy. . . ."

As she did not reply, he went on :

"Have you forgiven me . . . at last?"

At that, abruptly, carried away by some inward impulse,

she walked towards him with both hands outstretched ; and when he had taken, clasped and held her two hands, she said in a small voice, a moved, faltering voice that her husband had never heard :

“ Oh, my dear ! I am so glad.”

And Bondel, who was watching them, felt his whole body grow icy cold, as if he had been drenched in a cold bath.

THE MASK

THERE WAS A FANCY-DRESS BALL THAT EVENING AT THE Élysée-Montmartre. It was to celebrate Mid-Lent, and the crowd was pouring, like the water rushing over a weir, down the illuminated corridor that led to the dance room. The overpowering clamour of the orchestra, crashing like a storm of music, burst through walls and roof, spread abroad through the neighbourhood, and roused in the streets, and even in the neighbouring houses, the irresistible desire to leap, to be warm and amused, that slumbers in the depths of the human animal.

The regular frequenters of the place were arriving from all the four corners of Paris, people of all classes, who were fond of coarse, rowdy amusements that had a touch of drunkenness and debauch about them. There were shop assistants, pimps, prostitutes, prostitutes of every style, from the common cotton to the finest batiste, wealthy prostitutes, old and bejewelled, and the penniless sixteen-year-olds longing to enjoy themselves, to find men, to spend money. Elegants in tailed coats, in search of youthful flesh, deflowered of its primal innocence but still desirable, roved through the overheated crowd, peering, seemingly scenting it out, while the masks appeared absorbed in their desire for amusement. The famous quadrilles had already gathered round their caperings a crowded circle of people. The swaying hedge, the quivering mass of women and men who encircled the four dancers, knotted itself round like a serpent, advancing and withdrawing in time to the swerving movements of the dancers. The two women, whose thighs seemed fastened

to their bodies by india-rubber springs, executed amazing movements with their legs. They flung them up in the air with such vigour that the limbs seemed to be flying towards the sky, then suddenly, parting them as if they were open to the navel, sliding one in front and the other behind, they touched the ground with the centre of their bodies in a quick, wide split, revolting and comical to watch.

Their partners leaped, pirouetted on their feet, whirled round, their arms flapping and raised like stumps of featherless wings, and one guessed that under their masks their breath was coming in gasps.

One of them, who had taken a part in the most famous of the quadrilles to replace a celebrated dancer who was absent, the magnificent "Songe-au-gosse," and was doing his best to keep pace with the indefatigable "Arête-de-veau," was executing fantastic solo steps that provoked the joy and ironic mirth of the public.

He was lean, attired like a dandy, with a handsome varnished mask on his face, a mask with a fair curling moustache, topped by a curled wig.

He looked like a waxwork from the Grévin Museum, a strange and fantastic caricature of a charming young man in a fashion-plate, and he danced with an earnest but awkward effort, a comic ecstasy. He seemed rusty beside the others as he tried to imitate their gambols: he seemed crippled, clumsy, like a pug-dog playing with greyhounds. Mocking bravos encouraged him, and he, drunk with enthusiasm, leaped about with such frenzy that all at once, carried away by a wild rush, he ran full tilt into the wall of standers-by, which parted before him to let him pass, then closed up again round the inert body of the motionless dancer, lying face downwards.

Men picked him up and carried him away. There were shouts for "a doctor." A gentleman came forward, young,

very elegant, in a black coat with enormous pearls in his dress-shirt. "I am a professor in the Medical School," he said, modestly. They made way for him, and in a little room full of cartons, like a business man's office, he found the still unconscious dancer stretched across the chairs. The doctor tried first to remove the mask and discovered that it was fastened on in a complicated fashion, by a multitude of fine metal threads, which attached it cleverly to the edges of his wig and enclosed his entire head, in a solid ligature, of which one would have to know the secret. The neck itself was imprisoned in a false skin which formed a continuation of the chin, and this glove-like skin, painted flesh-colour, reached to the neck of his shirt.

They had to cut it all away with strong scissors, and when the doctor had made a gash from shoulder to temple in this amazing apparatus, he opened out this carapace and found therein an old face, the face of a pale, worn-out, thin, wrinkled man. The shock to those who carried in the young curled mask was so great that no one laughed, no one said a word.

They stared, where it lay on the rush-chairs, at this sad face with its closed eyes, besprinkled with white hairs, some long, falling from the forehead over his face, others short, sprouting from cheeks and chin, and there beside this poor head—the small, charming, polished mask, the fresh, still smiling mask.

The man came to himself after remaining unconscious for a long time, but he seemed still so feeble, so ill, that the doctor feared some dangerous complication.

"Where do you live?" said he.

The old dancer seemed to search in his memory and then to remember, and he gave the name of a street which no one knew. They had to ask him again for details of the neighbourhood. He furnished them with infinite pain, with

a slowness and indecision that betrayed the disturbance of his mind.

The doctor continued :

" I'll take you back there myself."

He had been seized with curiosity to know who this strange mummer was, to see where this amazing mountebank lived.

A cab soon carried them both to the other side of the slope of Montmartre.

It was in a tall house of poverty-stricken aspect, ascended by a shiny staircase, one of those for ever unfinished houses, riddled with windows, standing between two amorphous stretches of ground, squalid dens where live a horde of ragged, miserable wretches.

The doctor, clinging to the hand-rail, a winding wooden rod to which his hand stuck fast, supported the dazed old man, who was now regaining his strength, up to the fourth floor.

The door at which they had knocked opened, and a woman appeared, old too, and clean, with a white night-cap framing a bony face with strongly-marked features, the characteristic, broad, good, rough-hewn face of an industrious and faithful woman of the working-class. She cried :

" My God, what's happened to him ? "

When the affair had been explained to her briefly, she was reassured, and reassured the doctor himself by telling him that this was by no means the first of such adventures that had happened.

" He must go to bed, sir, that's all, he'll sleep, and next day there'll be nothing to show for it."

The doctor answered :

" But he can hardly speak."

" Oh, it's nothing, he's a little drunk, nothing else. He ate no dinner so that he should be supple, and then he drank

two absinthes to liven himself up. The absinthe, you know, revives his legs, but it takes away his wits and his words. He's not of an age now to dance as he does. No, indeed, I've lost all hope of his ever getting any sense."

The doctor, surprised, insisted :

"But why does he dance like that, old as he is?"

She shrugged her shoulders; she was flushed with the anger that was slowly rousing in her.

"Why, why indeed! To tell the truth, it's so that people will think he's young under his mask, so that the women will still take him for a gay dog and whisper nasty things in his ear, so that he can rub himself against their skin, all their dirty skins with their scents and their powder and their pomades. Oh, it's a nasty business! Well, I've had a life of it, I have, sir, for the forty years it's been going on. . . . But he must be got to bed first so he doesn't take any harm. Would it be too much trouble to you to give me a hand? When he's like that, I can't manage by myself."

The old man was sitting on the bed, with a drunken look, his long white hair fallen over his face.

His companion regarded him with pitying, angry eyes. She went on :

"Look what a fine face he has for his age, and he must go and disguise himself like a scamp so that people will think he's young. What a pity! He really has a fine face, sir! Wait, I'll show you before we put him to bed."

She went towards a table on which was the hand-basin, the water-jug, soap, comb and brush. She took the brush, then returned to the bed and, lifting the old drunkard's tangled head of hair, in the twinkling of an eye she gave him the face of a painter's model, with long curls falling on his neck. Then, stepping back to contemplate him :

"He really is handsome for his age, isn't he?"

"Very handsome," declared the doctor, who was beginning to find it very amusing.

She added :

"And if you had known him when he was twenty-five ! But we must put him to bed, or else his absinthes will upset his stomach. Now, sir, will you draw off his sleeve ? . . . higher . . . that's it . . . good . . . the breeches now . . . wait, I'll take off his shoes . . . that's better. . . . Now, hold him up while I turn down the bed . . . there . . . lay him down . . . if you think he'll disturb himself presently to make room for me, you're mistaken. I must find my corner, anywhere, anyhow. He doesn't worry about it. There, you gay spark, you !"

As soon as he felt himself between his bed-clothes, the good man shut his eyes, reopened them, shut them again, and his whole contented face expressed an energetic determination to sleep.

The doctor, examining him with an ever-growing interest, asked :

"So he plays the young man at fancy-dress balls, does he ?"

"At all of them, sir, and he comes back to me in the morning in such a condition you can't imagine. You know, it's regret that drives him there, and makes him put a cardboard face over his own. Yes, regret that he's no longer what he was, and so has no triumphs any more."

He was sleeping now, and beginning to snore. She contemplated him with a compassionate air, and added :

"Oh, he has had his triumphs, that man has ! More than you'd think, sir, more than the fine society gentleman and more than any tenor or any general."

"Really ? What was he then ?"

"Oh, it surprises you at first, seeing that you didn't know him in his best days. When I met him, it was at a ball, too,

for he was always attending them. I was taken as soon as I saw him—yes, taken like a fish on a line. He was charming, sir, so charming he'd bring tears to your eyes to look at him, dark as a crow, and curly-haired, with black eyes as large as windows. Oh, yes, he was a beautiful young man. He carried me off that evening, and I never left him again, sir, no, not for a day, in spite of everything. Oh, he has given me some bad times ! ”

The doctor asked :

“ You are married ? ”

She answered simply :

“ Yes, sir . . . or else he would have left me like the others. I have been his wife and his nurse, everything, everything he wanted . . . and he has made me weep for it . . . tears that I did not let him see. For he used to tell his adventures to me, to me . . . to me . . . sir—never realising how it hurt me to listen to them. . . . ”

“ But what was his profession ? ”

“ Oh, yes . . . I forgot to tell you. He was head assistant at Martel's, such an assistant as you never saw . . . an artist at ten francs the hour, on an average. . . . ”

“ Martel ? . . . who was Martel ? ”

“ The hairdresser, sir, the famous hairdresser of the Opéra, who had all the actresses as his customers. Yes, all the smartest actresses came to have their hair done by Ambroise, and gave him rewards that made his fortune. Oh, sir, all women are alike, yes, all of them. When a man pleases them, they offer themselves to him. It's so easy . . . and that's a hard lesson to learn. For he used to tell me all . . . he couldn't keep silent . . . no, he couldn't. These things give so much pleasure to men ! and more pleasure still to tell about than to do, perhaps.

“ When I saw him come home in the evening a little pale, with an air of contentment, and shining eyes, I used to say

to myself: 'Another one. I am sure he's caught another one.' Then I used to long to question him, a longing that scorched my heart, and I longed not to know, too, to prevent him from talking if he began. And we used to look at each other.

"I knew well that he would not hold his tongue, that he was going to come to the point. I felt it in his manner, in the laughing manner he assumed to make me understand.

'I have had a good day to-day, Madeleine.' I pretended not to see, not to guess: I set the table; I brought the soup; I sat down opposite him.

"In those moments, sir, it was just as if my liking for him was being crushed out of my body with a stone. That's a bad thing, that is, a dreadful thing. But he didn't guess it, not he, he didn't know: he felt the need to tell someone about it, to boast, to show how much he was loved . . . and he had only me to tell it to . . . you understand . . . only me . . . so . . . I had to listen and take it like poison.

"He began to eat his soup and then he used to say:

"'Another one, Madeleine.'

"I used to think: 'Now it's coming. My God, what a man! That I should have taken up with him!'

"Then he started: 'Another one, and a beauty. . . .' And it would be a little girl from the Vaudeville or maybe a little girl from the Variétés, and maybe one of the great ones too, the most famous of these theatrical ladies. He told me their names, described their rooms, and all, all, yes, all, sir. . . . Details that tore my heart. And he would keep on about it, he would tell his story again from beginning to end, so pleased that I used to pretend to laugh so that he would not be angry with me.

"Perhaps it wasn't all true. He was so fond of glorifying himself that he was quite capable of inventing such things!

And perhaps, too, it was true. On those evenings, he made a show of being tired, of wanting to go to bed after supper. We had supper at eleven, sir, because he never came in earlier, on account of the evening hairdressing.

"When he had finished relating his adventures, he used to smoke cigarettes and walk up and down the room, and he was such a handsome fellow, with his moustache and his curly hair, that I thought: 'It's true, all the same, what he tells me. Since I'm mad about that man myself, why shouldn't other women be infatuated with him too?' Oh, I wanted to cry about it, to scream, to run away, to throw myself out of the window, as I was clearing the table while he went on smoking. He yawned when he opened his mouth, to show me how tired he was, and he used to say two or three times before getting into bed: 'God, how I shall sleep to-night!'

"I bear him no grudge for it, because he did not know he hurt me. No, he could not know it! He loved to boast about women like a peacock spreading his tail. He came to imagine that they all looked at him and wanted him. It made it hard when he began to grow old.

"Oh, sir, when I saw his first white hair, it gave me a shock that took my breath away, and then joy . . . a cruel joy—but so deep, so deep. I said to myself: 'It's the end . . . it's the end.' I felt that I was going to be let out of prison. I should have him all to myself, when the others didn't want him any more.

"It was one morning, in our bed. He was still sleeping, and I was bending over him to kiss him awake, when I saw in the curls on his temple a little thread that shone like silver. What a surprise! I would not have believed it possible. For a moment I thought of pulling it out, so that he shouldn't see it himself! but looking closely, I caught sight of another one higher up. White hairs! He was

going to have white hairs ! It made my heart beat and my skin wet ; but all the same, at the bottom of my heart, I was very glad about it.

"It's not pleasant to think of it, but I went about my work in rare spirits that morning, and I didn't wake him just then ; and when he had opened his eyes without being roused, I said to him :

" ' Do you know what I discovered when you were asleep ? ' "

" ' No. ' "

" ' I discovered that you have some white hairs. ' "

"He gave a start of vexation that made him sit down as if I had tickled him, and he said in an angry tone :

" ' It's not true. ' "

" ' Yes, on the left temple. There are four of them. ' "

"He jumped from the bed to run to the mirror.

"He did not find them. Then I showed him the first, the lowest down, the little curly one, and I said to him :

" ' It's not surprising considering the life you lead. Two years from now you'll be finished. ' "

"Well, sir, I spoke truly ; two years later, you wouldn't have known him. How quickly a man changes ! He was still handsome, but he was losing his freshness, and women no longer ran after him. Oh, I had a hard life of it, I did, in those days : he made me suffer cruelly for it ! Nothing pleased him, not the least thing. He left his profession for the hat trade, in which he got rid of a lot of money. And then he tried to be an actor, and failed, and then he began to frequent public dances. Well, he has had the good sense to keep a little of his money, on which we're living. It's enough, but it's not much. To think that at one time he had almost a fortune !

"Now you see what he does. It's like a frenzy that takes hold of him. He must be young, he must dance with

women who smell of scent and pomade. Poor old darling that he is ! ”

Moved, ready to weep, she looked at her old husband who was snoring. Then, drawing near him with light steps, she dropped a kiss on his hair. The doctor had risen and was preparing to leave ; he could find nothing to say in the presence of this fantastic pair.

Then, as he was going, she asked :

“ Will you just give me your address ? If he gets worse I will come and fetch you.”

USELESS BEAUTY

I

A FASHIONABLE VICTORIA, DRAWN BY TWO MAGNIFICENT BLACK horses, stood at the door-step of the mansion. It was about half-past five on an evening towards the end of June, and the sky between the gables which fenced the courtyard, was full of bright light, warmth and brilliance.

The Comtesse de Mascaret appeared on the door-step exactly at the moment in which her husband, coming in, reached the gateway. He stopped for several seconds to watch his wife, and turned a little pale. She was very lovely, supple, and distinguished, with her long oval face, her complexion of warm ivory, and her large grey eyes and black hair : she stepped into the carriage without glancing at him, without even appearing to have seen him, with a grace so extraordinarily well-bred that the hideous jealousy by which he had been so long devoured tore at his heart afresh. He went up to her, and, bowing :

"You're going for a drive?" he said.

She let four words slip through her scornful lips :

"You see for yourself."

"The Bois?"

"Probably."

"May I be allowed to come with you?"

"The carriage is yours."

Without surprise at the tone in which she answered him, he stepped in and seated himself beside his wife ; then he gave the order : "The Bois."

The footman leaped on to the seat beside the coachman and

the horses, as usual, pawed and tossed their heads until they had turned into the street.

The couple remained side by side without speaking. He sought how to begin the conversation, but she maintained so obstinately hard an expression that he did not dare.

At last, he stealthily slid his hand towards the gloved hand of his wife and touched it as if by accident, but the gesture that she made in withdrawing her arm was so swift and so expressive of disgust that he hesitated anxiously, in spite of his habitual authority and despotism.

At length he muttered :

" Gabrielle."

Without turning her head, she asked :

" What do you want ? "

" You are perfectly adorable."

She made no answer, and remained leaning back in the carriage with the expression of an infuriated queen.

By now they were going up the Champs-Élysées, towards the Arc de Triomphe de l'Étoile. The enormous monument at the end of the long avenue reared its colossal arch against a fiery sky. The sun seemed to fall on it, scattering from the horizon a flaming dust.

And the flood of carriages, splashed with the rays of the sun on copper fittings and on the silver plating and crystal of harness and lamps, flowed in a double stream towards the park and the city.

The Comte de Mascaret began again :

" Dear Gabrielle."

Then, out of patience, she replied in an exasperated voice :

" Oh, leave me in peace, I beg you. I am now not even free to be alone in my carriage."

He pretended not to have heard, and went on :

" I have never seen you look as pretty as you do to-day."

She was quite at the end of her patience, and replied, with an anger which she could contain no longer :

"I am sorry you think so, for I swear that I will never be yours again."

He was obviously stunned and overwhelmed, and, his customary violence getting the better of him, he flung a "What's that you say?" which revealed more of the brutal master than of the man in love.

In a low voice, although the servants could hear nothing amid the deafening rumbling of the wheels, she repeated:

" 'What's that you say?' 'What's that you say?' How well I recognise you! You want me to tell you? "

"Yes."

"Tell you everything? "

"Yes."

"Everything that I have held in my heart since I became the victim of your ferocious egoism? "

He turned scarlet with astonishment and rage. He muttered between his clenched teeth:

"Yes, go on."

He was a man of tall build, with broad shoulders, with a great tawny beard, a handsome man, a gentleman, a man of the world who passed for a perfect husband and an excellent father.

For the first time since they had left the house, she turned towards him and looked him full in the face.

"Well, you are going to hear some unpleasant things, but you may as well know that I am ready for anything, that I will outface everybody, that I fear nothing, and to-day, you less than anybody."

He too looked her in the face, and a storm of anger shook him already. He whispered:

"You must be mad."

"No, but I will no longer be the victim of the detestable torture of maternity that you have made me undergo these last eleven years! I wish to live as a woman in society should, as I have a right to, as all wives have a right."

Suddenly turning pale again, he stammered :

" I don't understand."

" Oh, yes, you do. It is now three months since my last child was born, and as I still have all my beauty—which, in spite of your efforts, it is practically impossible to ruin, as you recognised just now when you saw me on the door-step—you think that it is time I became enceinte again."

" You are out of your mind."

" No. I am thirty and have seven children. We've been married for eleven years, and you hope that this will go on for another ten, after which you will stop being jealous."

He seized her arm, and squeezing it :

" I am not going to allow you to talk to me like this any longer."

" And I shall talk to you to the end, until I have finished all that I have to tell you. If you try to stop me, I shall raise my voice loud enough to be understood by the two servants on the box. I only let you sit beside me for this purpose, because I now have these witnesses who compel you to listen to me and to control yourself. Now listen. You have always been distasteful to me and I have always let you see it, for I have never lied. You married me against my will, you brought pressure to bear on my parents, who were shamed into giving me to you because you were very rich. They forced me to it, in spite of my tears.

" So you bought me, and as soon as I was in your power, when I began to become a companion ready to attach myself to you, to forget your campaign of intimidation and coercion, to remember only that I ought to be a devoted wife and to love you as much as it was possible for me to do, you became jealous, yes, as no other man has ever been, the jealousy of a spy, base, ignoble, degrading to yourself and insulting to me. I had not been married eight months before you suspected me of every treachery. You even informed me of it. What shame ! And since you could not prevent me from being

beautiful and pleasing, from being spoken of in drawing-rooms and even in the papers as being one of the prettiest women in Paris, you sought what you could discover to cut me off from flirtations, and so you hit on this abominable idea of making me pass my life in a state of perpetual pregnancy, until the time came when I should disgust every man. Oh, don't deny it! For a long time I understood nothing, then I guessed. You boasted of it even to your own sister, who told me, because she loves me and was horrified by your peasant grossness.

"Think of our battles, the doors broken open, the locks forced. Think of the existence to which you have condemned me these eleven years, the existence of a brood-mare in a stud. Then, the moment I became pregnant, you too lost your taste for me, and I would not see you for months. I was sent into the country to the family seat, to grass, to pasture, to have my baby. And when I reappeared, fresh and beautiful, indestructible, as alluring as ever, and still the centre of attraction, hoping at last that I was going to live for a short time as a young, wealthy woman in society should, jealousy overtook you again, and once more you began to pursue me with the infamous and hateful desire by which you are tortured at this moment as you sit beside me. It is not the desire to possess me—I would never have refused myself to you—it is the desire to deform me.

"Then there is another thing, abominable and mysterious, that I was long in perceiving (but I have grown quick to note your acts and thoughts): you are attached to your children by all the security which they have given you during the time I carried them in my body. You made your affection for them out of all the aversion that you had for me, out of all your shameful fears, momentarily set at rest, out of your joy at seeing me grown big.

"Oh, how often have I felt that joy in you, recognised it in your eyes, guessed it. You love your children as victories, not as flesh of your flesh. They are victories over me, over

my youth, over my beauty, over my charm, over the compliments paid to me, and over those whispered round me and left unspoken. And you are proud of it: you parade with them, you take them for drives in the Bois de Boulogne, and donkey-rides at Montmorency. You take them to matinées, so that people shall see you surrounded by them, and say:

What a good father! and repeat it. . . ."

He had seized her wrist with savage brutality, and was gripping it so violently that she fell silent, a groan tearing her throat.

And speaking very softly he said:

"I love my children, do you hear! Your confession is a shameful one for a mother to make. But you are mine. I am the master . . . your master . . . I can exact from you what I like, when I like . . . and I have the law . . . on my side."

He tried to crush her fingers in the vice of his heavy masculine fist. Livid with pain, she struggled in vain to withdraw her hand from the grip that was grinding it; and the suffering made her gasp for breath, and tears came to her eyes.

"You realise that I am the master," he said, "the stronger."

He had loosed his grasp a little. She replied:

"You believe I am a pious woman?"

Surprised, he stammered:

"Of course."

"You think that I believe in God?"

"Of course."

"Do you think that I could swear a lie to you before an altar that holds the body of Christ?"

"No."

"Will you come with me to a church?"

"What to do?"

"You'll see. Will you come?"

"If you insist, yes."

She raised her voice, calling:

"Philippe."

The coachman, bending his neck slightly, without taking his eyes off the horses, seemed to turn only his ear towards his mistress, who went on :

"Drive to the Church of Saint-Philippe-du-Roule."

And the victoria, which had just reached the entrance to the Bois, turned back towards Paris.

Wife and husband exchanged no further word during their new journey. Then, when the carriage had stopped before the entrance to the church, Mme de Mascaret jumped out and went in, followed a few paces behind by the Count.

She went straight up to the railings of the choir, and falling on her knees on a chair, hid her face in her hands and prayed. She prayed for a long time, and, standing beside her, he saw at last that she was weeping. She wept silently, as women weep in moments of terrible poignant grief. It was a sort of shudder that ran through her body and ended in a little sob, hidden and stifled under her fingers.

But the Comte de Mascaret decided that the situation was lasting too long, and he touched her on the shoulder.

The contact roused her as if it had burned her. Standing up, she looked him straight in the eyes :

"This is what I have to say to you. I'm not afraid, you can do what you like. You can kill me if you like. One of your children is not yours. I swear it to you before God who hears me in this place. It was the only revenge I could take on you, against your abominable masculine tyranny, against the forced labour of procreation to which you have condemned me. Who was my lover? You will never know. You will suspect the whole world. You will not discover him. I gave myself to him without love and without pleasure, solely to deceive you. And he too made me a mother. Which child is his? You will never know. I have seven children; find out the one! I had intended to tell you this later, for to deceive a man is no revenge unless he dreads it. You have forced me to confess it to you to-day : I have finished."

And she fled through the church, towards the open street-door, expecting to hear behind her the swift footsteps of the husband she had defied, and to lie crushed on the pavement under the sledge-hammer blow of his fist.

But she heard nothing and reached the carriage. She sprang in, shaken with anguish, fainting with fear, and cried to the coachman :

“ Home.”

The horses set off at a quick trot.

II

Shut in her room, the Comtesse de Mascaret awaited the dinner-hour as a condemned man waits for the hour of his execution. What would he do ? Had he come in ? Despotic and ungovernable as he was, ready for any violence, what had he meditated, what had he planned, what resolved ? There was no sound in the house, and she looked at the hands of her watch every moment. Her maid had come to dress her for the evening ; then she had gone.

Eight o'clock struck, and almost on the instant, there was a double knock at the door.

“ Come in.”

The butler appeared, and said :

“ Dinner is served, Madame.”

“ Is the Comte in ? ”

“ Yes, Madame. M. le Comte is in the dining-room.”

For a moment she had some thought of arming herself with a little revolver that she had bought some time previously, in view of the drama she was preparing in her heart. But she remembered that all the children would be there : and she took nothing but a bottle of salts.

When she entered the dining-room, her husband was waiting, standing near his chair. They bowed slightly to each other and sat down. Then the children took their places, too. The

three boys, with their tutor, the Abbé Marin, were on their mother's right hand : the three girls, with the English governess, Miss Smith, were on her left. Only the youngest child, a baby of three months, stopped in her room with her nurse.

The three girls, all fair, the eldest ten years old, wore blue frocks and were like exquisite dolls. The youngest was not yet three. They were all pretty already, and gave promise of becoming as lovely as their mother.

The three boys, two brown-haired, and the eldest, aged nine, already very dark, seemed likely to grow into vigorous, tall, broad-shouldered men. The whole family seemed to come of one stock, healthy and active.

The Abbé said grace, as always when no one had been invited to dinner, for the children did not come to the table when there were guests. Then they began dinner.

The Comtesse, in the grip of an emotion she had not anticipated, sat with downcast eyes, while the Count scrutinised both the three boys and the three girls, with questioning eyes that wandered from one head to another, disturbed and wretched. Suddenly, as he replaced his thin-stemmed glass in front of him, he broke it, and the red liquid spread upon the table-cloth. At the slight noise made by this slight accident, the Comtesse started so violently that she jumped in her chair. They looked at each other for the first time. Then, from moment to moment, in spite of themselves, in spite of the revulsion of body and mind with which every glance they exchanged overwhelmed them, they continued to cross eyes like exchanging shots.

The Abbé, feeling a constraint, but ignorant of its cause, tried to raise a conversation. He scattered subjects round him, but his useless attempts failed to hatch out one idea or bring one word to birth.

The Comtesse, out of natural tact and instinctive breeding, tried two or three times to answer him : but in vain. She found no words in the confusion of her thoughts ; and in the

silence of the vast room where the only sounds were the slight ones made by the knives and forks and plates, her voice almost frightened her.

Suddenly her husband, leaning towards her, said :

" Here in this room, in the midst of your children, will you swear to the truth of what you told me ? "

The hatred that had fermented in her veins broke suddenly out, and answering the question as determinedly as she answered his glance, she lifted her two hands, the right towards the heads of her sons, the left towards her daughters', and in a firm, resolute and unfaltering voice, said :

" On my children's heads, I swear that I told you the truth. "

He got up, and flinging his napkin on the table with a gesture of exasperation, he turned away, pushing his chair against the wall ; then went out without another word.

Thereupon she drew a deep breath, as if she had won a first victory, and went on in a calm voice :

" Don't take any notice, my darlings, your father has just suffered a great sorrow. And he is still very unhappy. It will pass off in a few days. "

Then she talked to the Abbé ; she talked to Miss Smith ; for her children she found loving words, little kindnesses, the gentle, indulgent mother ways that gladden childish hearts.

When dinner was over, she went into the drawing-room with all her family. She made the elder ones chatter, told stories to the young ones, and when it was time for them all to go to bed, she pressed lingering kisses on them, and then sending them away to sleep, she returned to her bedroom alone.

She waited, expecting him to come. And now that her children were far from her, she determined to defend her mortal body as she had defended her life in society ; and in the pocket of her gown she hid the little loaded revolver that she had bought some days before.

Hours passed ; clocks struck. All the noises of the house died down. Only the carriages continued to rush down the

streets with a confused rumbling, faint and far off through the thickness of the walls.

She waited, wide-awake and poised, not afraid of him now, prepared for anything and almost triumphant, since she had found for him a torture that he would feel every moment throughout his life.

But the first gleam of daylight had slipped through the fringed border of her curtains, and still he had not come to her. Then, stunned, she realised that he was not coming. Locking her door and thrusting across it the safety bolt that she had had fixed, she went to bed at last and lay there with wide-open eyes, thinking, unable to understand now, unable to guess what he was going to do.

Her maid, bringing in her tea, gave her a letter from her husband. He informed her that he was going on a long journey and announced in a postscript that his lawyer would supply her with all the money she required for her expenses.

III

It was at the Opéra, during an *entr'acte* of *Robert le Diable*. In the stalls, men stood up, hats on their heads, low-cut waistcoats revealing white shirts on which shone gold or jewelled studs, and looked round at the boxes full of women in evening-dress, covered with diamonds and pearls, blooming in this brilliantly-lighted greenhouse where lovely faces and gleaming shoulders seemed blossoming for all eyes to gaze on, in the midst of music and human voices.

Two friends, their backs turned to the orchestra, were quizzing, as they talked, all this gallery of elegance, all this exhibition of true or artificial charm, jewels, luxury and ostentation that spread itself in a circle round the great theatre.

One of them, Roger de Salins, said to his companion, Bernard Grandin :

"Look at the Comtesse de Mascaret, as lovely as ever."

The other man turned to stare at a tall woman in the box opposite: she still looked very young, and her startling beauty seemed to draw all eyes from every corner of the theatre. Her pale complexion, with its ivory gleams, gave her the look of a statue, while in her hair, which was black as night, a slender rainbow-shaped diadem, powdered with diamonds, glittered like a milky way.

When he had looked at her for some time, Bernard Grandin replied with a humorous accent of sincere conviction:

"Indeed, she's lovely!"

"How old will she be now?"

"Wait. I can tell you exactly. I have known her since her childhood. I saw her make her entry into society as a young girl. She is . . . she is . . . thirty . . . thirty . . . thirty-six years old."

"Impossible!"

"I'm sure of it."

"She looks twenty-five."

"She has had seven children."

"Incredible!"

"They are all seven alive too, and she's an admirable mother. I visit the house sometimes: it's a pleasant house, very quiet and restful. She achieves the difficult art of being a mother and a social being."

"Odd, isn't it? And there's never been any talk about her?"

"Never."

"But what about her husband? He's a strange man, isn't he?"

"Yes and no. There may have been some little incident between them, one of those little domestic incidents that one suspects, never hearing the whole story but guessing it fairly accurately."

"What was it?"

"I don't know. Mascaret was a model husband once; now

he is very much the man about town. So long as he remained a good husband, he had a frightful temper, suspicious and surly. Since he took to a gay life, he has become quite careless, but one feels that he has some worry, some grief, a gnawing canker of some kind: he is ageing very much, if his wife is not."

For a few minutes the two friends philosophised on the secret, incommunicable troubles, that differences of character or perhaps physical antipathies, unnoticed at first, can create in a family.

Roger de Salins, who was still eyeing Mme de Mascaret, added:

"It is incomprehensible that this woman has had seven children."

"Yes, in eleven years. After which she made an end, at the age of thirty, of her period of reproduction, in order to enter on the brilliant period of display, which seems far from finishing."

"Poor women!"

"Why do you pity them?"

"Why? Oh, my dear friend, think of it! Eleven years of pregnancy for a woman like that! What a hell! All her youth, all her beauty, her every hope of success, the whole romantic ideal of the brilliance of life, sacrificed to this abominable law of reproduction which turns the normal woman into a mere egg-laying machine."

"What's to be done? That's only nature!"

"Yes, but I say that Nature is our enemy, that we must fight all our lives against Nature, because she never ceases to force us back and back to the beast. Whatever there is of decency, of beauty, of graciousness, of idealism, on earth, was not put there by God, but by man, by man's brain. It is we who have introduced into the created world some little grace, beauty, a charm foreign to it, and mystery, by the songs we sing of it, the interpretations we offer, by the admiration of poets, the idealisations of artists, wise explanations which are

wrong, but do find ingenious reasons for phenomena. God has created only gross creatures, full of the germs of disease, who after a few years of animal development grow old in infirmity, with all the ugliness and all the impotence of human decrepitude. He made them, it seems, only to reproduce themselves in a revolting fashion and thereafter to die, like the ephemeral insects of summer evenings. I said, 'to reproduce themselves in a revolting fashion': I repeat it. What, indeed, is more shameful, more repugnant than the filthy and ridiculous act of human reproduction, from which all delicate sensibilities shrink and will always shrink in disgust? Since all the organs invented by this economical and malignant creator serve two purposes, why did he not choose others, that were not ill-suited and defiled, to which to entrust this sacred mission, the noblest and most uplifting of all human functions? The mouth that nourishes the body with material food, is also the medium of words and thoughts. The flesh is restored by it at the same time that it gives expression to the intelligence. The sense of smell, which gives the lungs their vital air, gives the brain all the perfumes in the world: the scent of flowers, woods, trees, the sea. The ear which puts us in communication with our fellow-beings, has also made it possible for us to invent music, to create from its sounds imagination, happiness, the infinite, and even physical pleasure. But one would suppose that a malicious and cynical creator had wished to prevent man from ever ennobling, beautifying and idealising his relations with women. Nevertheless, man found love, which is not so bad as a reply to this sardonic God, and he has so endowed it with poetical conceits that woman often forgets to what contacts she is forced. Those among us who are powerless to delude ourselves by self-idealisation, have invented vice and refined debauch, which is yet another way of making a fool of God and rendering a wanton homage to beauty.

"But the normal human being makes children like a beast mated by law.

"Look at this woman! Isn't it abominable to think that this jewel, this pearl born to be beautiful, admired, fêted and adored, has passed eleven years of her life in giving heirs to the Comte de Mascaret!"

Bernard Grandin said, laughing:

"There's a good deal of truth in that; but few people would understand you."

Salins became excited.

"Do you know my conception of God?" said he. "A monstrous creative organ unknown to us, who sows millions of worlds through space as a single fish lays eggs in the sea. He creates because that is his God-function: but he is ignorant of what he does, senselessly prolific, unconscious of the multitudinous combinations produced by his scattered germs. Human thought is a happy little accident born of the chances of his fecundities, a local accident, passing and unforeseen, condemned to disappear with the earth, and to begin again, perhaps, here or elsewhere, the same or different, with the new combinations of the eternal re-beginnings. It is due to this, to this little accident of intelligence, that we exist so ill at ease in a state of being not made for us, not prepared to receive, house, nourish and content intelligent beings. And it is due to this too that we have to fight without rest, such of us as are truly refined and civilised, against what are still called the designs of Providence."

Grandin, who was listening to him attentively, knowing of old the startling leaps of his imagination, asked him:

"So you believe that human thought is a spontaneous product of the blind parturition of God?"

"Why not? A fortuitous function of the nervous centres of our brains, similar to unforeseen chemical actions due to new combinations, similar too to a manifestation of electricity, created by friction or by unexpected contiguities, in short to all the phenomena engendered by the infinite and fecund fermentations of living matter."

"Why, my good fellow, the proof leaps to the eye of anyone who looks round him. If human thought, willed by a conscious creator, had been intended to be that which it has become, quite different from the thought and the resignation of the beasts, exacting, questing, disturbed, tormented, would the world created to receive the creatures that we are to-day have been this uncomfortable little rabbit-run, this salad bed, this stony, spherical, sylvan kitchen-garden, where your short-sighted Providence destined us to live naked, in caves or under trees, nourished by the murdered flesh of the animals, our brothers, or the raw vegetables growing in sun and rain?"

"But it only requires a second's reflection to realise that this world is not made for creatures like us. Thought, hatched and developed by a miraculous quality of the nerves of our brain cells, all powerless, ignorant and confused as it is and will always remain, makes all us intellectuals eternal and miserable exiles in this world.

"Contemplate this world, as God gave it to the beings who dwell on it. Is it not visibly and solely designed, planted and wooded for animals? What is there for us? Nothing. And for them, all: caves, trees, leafy places, rivers, watering-places, food and drink. So fastidious people like me are never happy there. Only men who approximate to the brutes are content and satisfied. But the others, poets, squeamish creatures, dreamers, seekers, restless beings . . . Ah, poor wretches!

"I eat cabbages and carrots, my God, onions, turnips and radishes, because we have been forced to accustom ourselves to them, even to acquire a taste for them, and because nothing else grows, but these things are a food fit only for rabbits and goats, as grass and clover are food for horses and cows. When I look at the ears of a field of ripe corn I don't doubt that it has germinated in the soil for the beaks of sparrows and larks, but not for my mouth. So when I masticate bread I am robbing the birds, as I am robbing the weasel and the fox in eating poultry. Are not quail, pigeon and partridge the natural prey

of the hawk ; mutton, venison and beef the prey of the great carnivorous beasts, rather than meats fattened for us to be served roasted with truffles that have been disinterred especially for us by the pigs ?

“ Animals have nothing to do but live here. They are in their own place, sheltered and fed, they have only to browse or hunt or eat each other, following the promptings of their instincts, for God never foresaw gentleness and peaceful ways : he foresaw only the death of creatures impelled to destroy and devour each other.

“ As for us ! Oh, we have had to use labour, effort, patience, invention, imagination, industry, talent, and genius to make this root-bound, stony soil something like a dwelling-place. Think what we have done, in spite of Nature, in opposition to Nature, to establish ourselves in barely tolerable conditions hardly decent, hardly comfortable, hardly elegant, unworthy of us.

“ And the more civilised, intelligent and refined we are, the more we must vanquish and tame the animal instinct that represents the will of God in us.

“ Consider how we have had to invent civilisation, which includes so many things, so very many things of all kinds, from socks to telephones. Think of all the things you see every day, all the things that are useful to us in every sort of way.

“ To soften our brutish fate, we have discovered and manufactured everything, beginning with houses, and going on to delicate foods, sweets, cakes, drinks, liqueurs, stuffs, clothing, ornaments, beds, mattresses, carriages, railways, innumerable machines : more, we have discovered science and art, writing and poetry. Yes, we have created the arts, poetry, music, painting. Everything that belongs to the imagination comes from us, and all the gay conceits of life, feminine dress and masculine talent, which have managed to make the merely reproductive existence, for which alone a divine Providence gave us life, a little more beautiful in our eyes, a little less naked, less monotonous and less harsh.

"Look at this theatre. Is there not here a human world created by us, unforeseen by the eternal Fates, unknown to Them, comprehensible to our minds alone, a gay titillation of mind and senses, created solely for and by the feeble, discontented, restless animal that we are?"

"Look at this woman, Mme de Mascaret. God had made her to live in a cave, naked, or clothed in the skins of beasts. Isn't she better like this? But, talking of her, who knows why or how her brute of a husband, having had a woman like that for a companion and especially after having been uncouth enough to make her seven times a mother, abandoned her all at once to run after loose women?"

Grandin replied:

"Well, that's probably just the reason. He discovered at last that sleeping in his own bed costs him too much. He has arrived by way of domestic economy at the same theories you hold philosophically."

The bell rang three times for the last act. The two friends turned round, removed their hats and took their seats.

IV

Side by side in the brougham that took them back to their house after the performance at the Opéra, the Comte and Comtesse de Mascaret sat in silence. But suddenly the husband said to his wife:

"Gabrielle!"

"What is it?"

"Don't you think this has lasted long enough?"

"What?"

"The abominable torture to which you have condemned me for the last six years."

"Well, I can't help it."

"At least, tell me which one it is."

"Never!"

"Think how I can no longer see my children or feel them round me without my heart being wrung by this doubt. Tell me which it is, and I swear I will forgive, that I'll treat it just like the others."

"I have no right to do that."

"Don't you see that I can't endure this life any longer, this gnawing thought, this question that I never cease to ask myself, this question that tortures me every time I look at them? I shall go mad."

She asked :

"So you have suffered deeply?"

"Frightfully. Would I otherwise have endured the horror of living beside you, and the still worse horror of feeling, of knowing that there is one child among them, whom I can't recognise, who makes it impossible for me to love the others?"

She repeated :

"So you really have suffered very much?"

He answered in a sad, restrained voice :

"Don't I tell you every day that it is an intolerable torture to me? But for that, would I have come back, would I have remained in this house, near you and near them, if I had not loved them, my children? Oh, you have behaved shamefully towards me. The only passion of my heart is for my children : you know it well. I feel for them as a father of olden days, as I was for you the husband of an older ideal of family life, for I remain a man of instinct, a man of nature, a man of an earlier day. Yes, I own it, you made me terribly jealous, because you are a woman of another race, another spirit, with other needs. Oh, I shall never forget the things you said to me. From that day, too, I cared no more what you did. I did not kill you, because that would have deprived me of the last means on earth by which I could find out which of our . . . of your children is not mine. I have waited, but I have suffered more than you would believe, for I dare not love them now, except perhaps the eldest : I daren't look at them now, call them,

embrace them, I can't take one of them on my knees now without wondering : ' Is this the one ? ' For six years I have been courteous to you, even kind and complaisant towards you. Tell me the truth and I give you my word that I will do nothing unkind."

In the darkness of the carriage, he thought he could feel that she was moved, and feeling that at last she was going to speak, he said :

" I beg you to tell me, I implore you."

She murmured :

" Perhaps I have been more guilty than you think. But I could not, I could not go on with that detestable life of continued pregnancies. There was only one way in which I could drive you from my bed. I lied before God, and I lied with my hand raised to my children's heads, for I never deceived you."

He seized her arm in the darkness, and gripping it as he had done on the terrible day when they drove in the Bois, he stammered :

" Is it true ? "

" Quite true."

But, distraught with agony, he groaned :

" Oh, I shall be a prey to new doubts that will never end. Which time did you lie, that other day or to-day ? How can I believe you now ? How can I believe a woman after that ? I shall never know again what to think. I had rather you had said to me : ' It's Jacques,' or ' It's Jeanne.' "

The carriage was turning into the courtyard of the house. When it drew up before the steps, the Comte descended first and, as always, offered his arm to his wife to mount the steps.

" Can I talk to you for a few minutes ? " he said.

She answered :

" Certainly."

They went into a small sitting-room, and a rather surprised footman lit its candles.

Then, when they were alone, he went on :

"How am I to know the truth? I have implored you a thousand times to speak, you remained silent, impenetrable, inflexible, inexorable, and now you come to me to-day and tell me that you lied. For six years you have found it in your heart to let me believe a thing like that! No, it's now you're lying, I don't know why, out of pity for me, perhaps?"

She replied, with a grave, sincere air :

"But if I had not lied I should have had four more children in the last six years."

He cried :

"Is it a mother who talks so?"

"Ah," she said, "I don't feel in the least as a mother towards children who are not born, I'm content to be the mother of those I have, and to love them with all my heart. I am, we are, women of the civilised world. We no longer are, and we refuse to be, mere females who replenish the earth."

She rose, but he seized her hands.

"One word, only one word, Gabrielle. Will you tell me the truth?"

"I have just told you it. I have never deceived you."

He looked her squarely in the face, so lovely as she was, with her eyes grey as cold skies. In her dusky hair, in that shadowy night of black hair, shone the diadem powdered with diamonds like a milky way. Then he felt suddenly, by some intuition he felt that this being before him was not only a woman destined to perpetuate her race, but the strange and mysterious product of all our complicated desires, garnered in us by the centuries, turned aside from the primitive and divine goal to wander towards a mystic beauty half-seen and intangible. Thus there are some of them which flourish only for our dreams, adorned with all the poetry, the romantic luxury, the conceits and the æsthetic charm that civilisation has gathered round woman, this statue of flesh that engenders immaterial appetites as much as fevers of the senses.

Her husband remained standing in front of her, dazed by this tardy and obscure discovery, reaching directly back to the cause of his old jealousy and understanding it hardly at all.

At last he said :

"I believe you. I feel that at this moment you are not lying : and indeed it always seemed to me before that you were lying."

She held out her hand :

"We are friends then ?"

He took this hand and kissed it, answering :

"We are friends. Thank you, Gabrielle."

Then he went out, still looking at her, marvelling that she was still so lovely, and feeling in himself the birth of a strange emotion, an emotion perhaps more terrible than the simple love of old.

A PORTRAIT

LOOK, THERE'S MILIAL," SAID SOMEONE NEAR ME. I LOOKED at the man they were pointing out, for I had long wanted to make the acquaintance of this Don Juan.

He was no longer young. His grey hair, a shaggy grey, was a little like one of those skin caps that certain Northern races wear on their heads, and his fine, long beard, falling to his chest, also bore a resemblance to fur. He was talking to a woman, leaning towards her, speaking in a low voice, while he looked at her with a tender gaze, eloquent of homage and affection.

I knew his manner of life, or at least such of it as was generally known. He had been loved madly, many times, and his name had been mixed up in various dramas. He was spoken of as a very fascinating, almost irresistible man. When I questioned the women who were loudest in his praise, to discover the source of his power, they always replied, after some searching :

"I don't know . . . it's charm."

Certainly, he was not handsome. He had none of the elegances which we imagine to be attributes of the conquerors of feminine hearts. I wondered, with much interest, in what lay his fascination. In his wit? . . . No one had ever quoted his sayings to me, nor even celebrated his intelligence. . . . In his look? . . . Perhaps. . . . Or in his voice? . . . Some peoples' voices have sensuous and irresistible attractions, the savour of exquisite foods. One hungers to hear them, and the sound of their words penetrates our sensibilities, like an epicurean dish.

A friend was passing ; I asked him :

"Do you know M. Milial?"

"Yes."

"Please introduce us."

A minute later we were exchanging handshakes and conversing between two doors. What he said was sensible, and pleasant to listen to, but in no way superlative. He had, indeed, a beautiful voice, soft, caressing, musical; but I have heard voices more taking, more moving. One listened to it with pleasure, as one watches the flowing of a pleasant stream. No great effort of thought was necessary to follow it, no hidden meaning roused one's curiosity, no anticipation kept one's interest on the alert. His conversation was rather tranquillising, and awoke in us neither a lively desire to respond and contradict, nor a delighted approbation.

It was, moreover, as easy to answer him as to listen. The reply rose to one's lips of its own accord, as soon as he had finished talking, and the phrases ran towards him as if what he had said made them issue quite naturally from one's mouth.

I was shortly struck by a reflection. I had known him for a quarter of an hour, and it seemed to me that he was an old friend, that everything about him had been familiar to me for a long time: his face, his gestures, his voice, his ideas.

Abruptly, after a few moments of talk, he seemed to me to have established himself on an intimate footing. All doors between us were open, and perhaps, of my own volition, I would—had he solicited them—have made confidences which ordinarily are given only to one's oldest friends.

There was certainly a mystery here. The barriers that separate all creatures, which time removes one by one, when sympathy, like tastes, an identical intellectual culture and constant relationship have little by little unpadlocked them, seemed not to exist between him and me, nor, doubtless, between him and all people, men and women, whom chance threw in his path.

At the end of half an hour, we separated, agreeing to see

each other again often, and he gave me his address, inviting me to dine with him on the next day but one.

I forgot the hour and arrived too early: he had not come in. A correct and silent servant showed me into a beautiful drawing-room, a rather dim, intimate, studied room. I felt at home there, as in my own house. I have often remarked the effect of rooms on the mind and disposition. There are some in which one always feels stupid: there are others, on the contrary, where one always feels alert. Some sadden us, although they are light, white and gilded: others cheer us, although they are hung in quiet colours. Our eye, like our heart, has its hates and its likings, which often it does not openly declare to us, imposing them secretly and stealthily on our imaginations. The harmony of furniture and walls, the style of our whole surroundings, acts instantly on our intellectual nature as the air of forest, sea or mountain modifies our physical nature.

I was seated on a divan completely covered with cushions, and I felt suddenly sustained, borne up, held in place by these small, silk-covered sacks of feathers, as if the form and place of my body had been impressed beforehand on this furniture.

Then I looked round. There was nothing startling in the room; it was filled with pretty, unobtrusive things, furniture at once rare and simple, Oriental curtains that did not seem to have come from the Louvre but from the interior of a harem, and facing me, the portrait of a woman. It was a portrait of medium size, showing the head and upper part of the body, and the hands, which held a book. She was young, bare-headed, her hair arranged in smooth plaits, and was smiling a little sadly. It may have been because she was bare-headed, or it may well have been due to the effect of her artless charm, but never had a woman's portrait seemed to me so much at home as this one did in this place. Almost all those I know are definitely on show, whether the lady is in elaborate dress, with her hair becomingly arranged and an air of being fully conscious

that she is posing before the painter in the first place, and ultimately before all the people who will look at her, or whether she has adopted an attitude of abandon, and attired herself with careful informality.

Some are standing, majestic creatures, in all their beauty, with an air of hauteur which they cannot have sustained for long in the ordinary course of their lives; others languish in the immobility of the painted canvas; and all of them have some trifle, a flower or a jewel, a fold of their gown or their lips, which one feels to have been arranged by the painter, for the sake of an effect. Whether they wear a hat, a lace scarf on their head, or simply their hair, they convey the impression of something just a little unnatural. Why? One doesn't know, since one doesn't know them all, but the impression is there. They have the air of paying a visit somewhere, among people whom they wish to please: before whom they wish to appear to their best advantage: and they have studied their attitude, sometimes a modest one, sometimes an arrogant.

What shall I say of this portrait? She was in her own home and alone. Yes, she was alone, for she was smiling as people smile when they think in solitude on something at once sad and sweet, and not as they smile when they are being looked at. She was so much alone and so much in her own place, that she created solitude in this huge room, absolute solitude. She dwelt in it, filled it, she alone gave it life: a crowd of people might enter there, and all of them speak, laugh, even sing: she would be there, for ever alone, smiling a solitary smile, and alone she would bring it alive with her pictured gaze.

Her gaze was unique, too. It was turned directly to me, caressing and steady, but it did not see me. All portraits know that they are being contemplated, and they answer with their eyes, with eyes that see, and think, that follow us unwinkingly from the moment we enter the room where they inhabit until the moment we leave it.

This portrait did not see me, saw nothing, although its glance

was bent directly on me. I recalled Baudelaire's amazing line :

"Thine eyes that draw me like a portrait's eyes."

They did indeed draw me in an irresistible fashion, they disturbed me in some strange, powerful, novel way, these painted eyes that had lived, that perhaps lived still. Ah, what infinite charm, soft as a passing breeze, seductive as the fading sky of a rose and blue and lilac twilight, and faintly melancholy like the night that follows on its heels, came from that sombre frame, those impenetrable eyes ! Those eyes, those eyes created by a few strokes of the brush, held in their depths the mystery of that which seems to be and is not, of that which a woman's look can express, of that which wakes in our hearts the first stirring of love.

The door opened. M. Milial came in. He apologised for being late. I apologised for being early. Then I said to him :

"Is it indiscreet to ask you who this woman is ?"

He answered :

"It is my mother, who died very young."

And at that I understand whence came this man's inexplicable charm.

THE CRIPPLE

THIS ADVENTURE HAPPENED TO ME ABOUT 1882.

I had just settled myself in the corner of an empty carriage, and had shut the door, in the hope of being left undisturbed, when it was abruptly reopened and I heard a voice say :

"Take care, sir, we are just at the crossing of the lines : the footboard is very high."

Another voice answered :

"Don't worry, Laurent, I'll hold fast."

Then a head appeared, covered with a round cap, and two hands, clinging to the leather straps that hung from both sides of the carriage door, slowly hoisted up a fat body whose feet on the footboard produced the sound of a stick striking the ground.

But when the man had got the upper part of his body into the compartment, I saw the black-painted end of a wooden leg appearing in the limp-hanging leg of his trousers, followed shortly by a similar stump.

A head came into view behind this traveller, and asked :

"Are you all right, sir ?"

"Yes, my boy."

"Then here are your parcels and your crutches."

And a manservant, who had the appearance of an old soldier, climbed up too, carrying in his arms a quantity of objects wrapped in black and yellow papers, carefully tied with strings, and placed them one after another on the rack above his master's head. Then he said :

"There you are, sir, that's the lot. There are five of them : the sweets, the doll, the drum, the gun, and the pâté de foie gras."

"That's right, my boy."

"I hope you'll have a comfortable journey, sir."

"Thanks, Laurent ; keep yourself fit."

The man went away, reclosing the door, and I looked at my neighbour.

He must have been about thirty-five years old, although his hair was almost white ; he wore various decorations, he was moustached, and very stout, a victim to the short-winded obesity that falls on strong active men whom some infirmity deprives of exercise.

He mopped his forehead, panted, and giving me a direct glance, said :

"Does smoke annoy you, sir ?"

"No, sir."

That eye, that voice, that face, I knew them well. But where, whence ? I had certainly met the fellow, I had talked to him, I had shaken his hand. It went a long way back, a very long way, it was lost in those mists where the mind seems to grope after memories and pursue them, like flying phantoms, without grasping them.

He too was now scrutinising my face in the fixed and tenacious manner of a man who has some dim remembrance but cannot quite place it.

Our eyes, embarrassed by this unwinking exchange of glances, turned away ; then, a few minutes later, drawn back once more by the secret obstinate will of the labouring memory, they met again, and I said :

"Really, sir, instead of looking at one another out of the corner of our eyes for an hour, wouldn't it be more sensible to join forces to discover where we knew each other ?"

My neighbour answered pleasantly :

"You're quite right, sir."

I told him my name.

"My name is Henry Bouclair. I'm a magistrate."

He hesitated a moment ; then with that uncertainty of glance and voice produced by severe mental tension, he said :

"Ah, that's it. I met you at the Poincels, a long time ago, before the war, it must be twelve years since."

"Yes, sir . . . ah . . . you're Lieutenant Revalière?"

"Yes, I was even Captain Revalière until the day when I lost my feet, both at one stroke, from a passing ball."

And we looked at one another again, now that we knew each other.

I recalled perfectly having seen this handsome, slender youth who led cotillions with an agile, graceful energy which had earned him the nickname of "Whirlwind." But behind this vision, sharply evoked, hovered yet another one I could not grasp, some story that I had known and forgotten, one of those stories to which one lends a friendly and short-lived interest, which leave in one's mind only an almost imperceptible trace.

It was something to do with love. I recaptured just that particular emotional impression in the depths of my memory, but nothing more, an emotional impression comparable to the scent which a dog can perceive on ground where game has passed.

Little by little, however, the shadows lifted and the face of a young girl rose before my eyes. Then her name burst in my head like an exploding cracker: Mlle de Mandal. I recalled the whole affair now. It was, indeed, a love-story, but a commonplace one. That young girl was in love with that young man, when I met him, and there was talk of their approaching marriage. He himself seemed very much in love, very happy.

I lifted my eyes towards the rack where all the parcels carried by my neighbour's servant were shaking with the jolts of the train, and the man's voice sounded again in my ears as if he had hardly finished speaking.

He had said:

"There you are, sir, that's the lot. There are five of them: the sweets, the doll, the drum, the gun, and the *pâté de foie gras*."

Thereupon, in a flash, a romance developed and unfolded

itself in my head. It was, indeed, exactly like all the romances I had read, in which sometimes the young man, sometimes the young girl, marries his or her betrothed after the catastrophe, bodily or financial. So this officer who had been maimed in the war, had after the campaign come back to find the girl who had promised to marry him, and she had kept her word and given herself to him.

I thought it beautiful, but simple, as one thinks all self-sacrifices and all the dénouements of books and plays simple. It always seems to us, as we read or as we listen, in these schools of magnanimity, that we should have sacrificed ourselves with enthusiastic pleasure, with superb impulsiveness. But we are sorely put out the next day, when some luckless friend comes to borrow a little money from us.

Then, suddenly, another supposition, less romantic and more realistic, took the place of the first. Perhaps he had married before the war, before the frightful accident when his legs were shot away, and she, desolate and resigned, had been forced to take back, care for, console and sustain this husband, who had left her strong and handsome, and returned with feet mowed off, a dreadful wreckage condemned to immobility, to impotent rages and an inevitable obesity.

Was he happy or in torment? A desire, at first vague, then increasing, at last irresistible, came upon me, to learn his story, to know at least the principal points of it, which would allow me to guess what he could not or would not say.

I talked to him, my thoughts busy all the time. We had exchanged a few commonplace words; and, my eye turned towards the rack, I kept thinking: "So he has three children. The sweets are for his wife, the doll for his little girl, the drum and the gun for his boys, the pâté de foie gras for himself."

I asked him abruptly:

"You are a father, sir?"

He answered:

"No, sir."

I felt suddenly confused, as if I had committed a gross breach of taste, and I added :

"I beg your pardon. I had imagined that you were, from hearing your man speak of the toys. One hears things without listening, and draws conclusions in spite of oneself."

He smiled, then murmured :

"No, I am not even married. I never got beyond the preliminaries."

I had the air of remembering suddenly.

"Oh . . . that's so, you were engaged when I knew you, engaged to Mlle de Mandal, I think."

"Yes, sir, you have an excellent memory."

I became outrageously audacious, and added :

"Yes, I think I remember also having heard that Mlle de Mandal had married Monsieur . . . Monsieur . . ."

He uttered the name placidly :

"M. de Fleurel."

"Yes, that's it. Yes . . . I even remember having heard your wound spoken of in this connection."

I looked him full in the face ; and he blushed.

His full, swollen face, which the constant accession of blood had already made purple, took on a still deeper hue.

He replied eagerly, with the abrupt earnestness of a man who is pleading a cause lost beforehand, lost in his mind and in his heart, but which he wishes to carry in the eyes of the world.

"People are wrong, sir, to couple my name with Mme de Fleurel's. When I returned from the war, without my feet, alas, I should never, never have allowed her to become my wife. Was such a thing possible? One does not marry to make a parade of generosity, sir : one marries to live every day, every hour, every minute, every second with one man ; and if this man is deformed, as I am, to marry him is to be condemned to a suffering which will last until death. Oh, I understand, I admire all sacrifices, all devotions when they have a limit, but I do not countenance a woman's renunciation of

the whole of a life in which she hopes for happiness, of all joys, of all dreams, just to satisfy the admiration of the gallery. When I hear, on the floor of my room, the clatter of my stumps and my crutches, the noise like a mill-wheel that I make with every step I take, I feel exasperated to the verge of strangling my servant. Do you think one could allow a woman to bear what one cannot endure oneself? And then, do you suppose they're pretty, my stumps of legs? . . ."

He was silent. What could I say to him? I felt that he was right. Could I blame her, despise her, even give judgment against him, or against her? No. And yet? This dénouement, conforming as it did to convention, the usual thing, truth and appearances, did not satisfy my appetite for romance. Those heroic stumps called for a splendid sacrifice of which I had been deprived, and I felt cheated thereby.

I asked him abruptly:

"Mme de Fleurel has children?"

"Yes, a girl and two boys. I am taking these toys to them. Her husband and she have been very good to me."

The train was climbing the hill of Saint-Germain. It ran through the tunnels, entered the station, came to a standstill.

I saw going to offer my arm to help the mutilated officer to descend when two hands were stretched out to him through the open door.

"How do you do, my dear Revalière?"

"Ah, how do you do, Fleurel?"

Behind the man, his wife stood smiling, radiant, still pretty, waving greetings with her gloved fingers. Beside her, a little girl was jumping for joy, and two small boys were staring with greedy eyes at the drum and the gun emerging from the carriage rack in their father's hands.

When the cripple reached the platform, all the children embraced him. Then they set off, and the small girl lovingly held the polished crossbar of one crutch in her tiny hand, as she might have held her big friend's thumb, as she walked beside him.

THE MOTHER SUPERIOR'S TWENTY-FIVE FRANCS

HE REALLY WAS COMIC, OLD PAVILLY, WITH HIS GREAT SPIDER legs, his little body, his long arms, and his pointed beard, surmounted by a flame of red hair on the top of his skull.

He was a clown, a peasant clown, a born clown, born to play tricks, to raise laughter, to play parts, simple parts, since he was the son of a peasant, and a peasant himself, hardly able to read. Oh, yes, the good God had created him to amuse other people, the poor devils of the country-side who have no theatres and no feasts ; and he amused them with all his might and main. In the café, they stood him drinks to keep him there, and he drank undauntedly, laughing and joking, laughing at every one without annoying anyone, while the onlookers rolled with laughter.

He was so comic that, ugly as he was, the girls themselves did not resist him, they were laughing so heartily. He carried them, with quips and jests, behind a wall, into a ditch, into a stable, then he tickled them and squeezed them, keeping up such an amusing patter, that they held their sides as they repulsed him. Then he leaped about, pretending he was going to hang himself, and they writhed, with tears in their eyes ; he chose his moment, and tumbled them over so handily that they surrendered all, even those who had defied him, as a joke.

Well, towards the end of June, he went as harvest labourer to Le Hariveau's farm, near Rouville. For three whole weeks he delighted the harvesters, men and women, by his pranks, night and day. In the daytime, he appeared in the fields, in the middle of the swaths of corn, in an old straw hat that hid his russet top-knot, gathering up the yellow corn with his long

skinny arms and binding it into sheaves ; then stopping to sketch a comic gesture that evoked shouts of laughter down the length of the field from the workers, whose eyes never left him. At night, he glided like a crouching beast through the straw in the barns where the women slept, and his hands prowled about, rousing shouts and creating disturbances. They chased him off, using their sabots as weapons, and he fled on all fours, like a fantastic monkey, amid explosions of mirth from the entire room.

On the last day, as the wagon-load of harvesters, adorned with ribbons and bagpipes, shouting and singing and joyously drunk, were going down the wide white road, drawn at the slow pace of six dappled horses, led by a youngster in a smock, with a cockade in his cap, Pavilly, in the middle of sprawling women, was dancing a drunken satyr's dance, that kept the young rascals of boys open-mouthed on the banksides of the farms, and the peasants lost in wonder at his incredible anatomy.

All at once, as they reached the fence of Le Hariveau's farm, he made a bound with upflung arms, but as he fell back he unluckily struck against the side of the long cart, went head-long over, fell on to the wheel, and bounced off on to the road.

His comrades sprang out. He moved no more, one eye shut, the other open, pale with fear, his great limbs stretched out in the dust.

When they touched his right leg, he began to cry out, and when they tried to stand him up, he fell down.

"I'll be bound he's broken his leg," cried a man.

He had indeed broken a leg.

Farmer Le Hariveau had him laid on a table ; and a rider hurried to Rouville to find a doctor, who arrived an hour later.

The farmer was a very generous man, and he announced that he would pay for the man to be treated at the hospital.

So the doctor carried Pavilly off in his carriage, and deposited him in a whitewashed dormitory, where his fracture was set.

As soon as he realised that he would not die of it, and that

he was going to be cared for, cured, pampered, and nourished, with nothing to do, lying on his back between two sheets, Pavilly was seized with an overwhelming merriment, and began to laugh a silent, long-drawn laughter that revealed his decaying teeth.

As soon as a sister approached the bed, he grimaced contentedly at her, winking his eye, twisting his mouth, and moving his nose, which was very long and which he could move as he pleased. His neighbours in the dormitory, ill as they were, could not refrain from laughing, and the sister in charge often came to his bedside to enjoy a quarter of an hour's amusement. He invented the most comic tricks for her, quite novel jests, and as he had in him an instinct for every sort of play-acting, he turned devout to please her and spoke of the good God with the grave air of a man that knows that there are moments to which jests are inappropriate.

One day, he bethought himself of singing songs to her. She was delighted and came oftener; then, to turn his voice to good account, she brought him a book of hymns. Then he might be seen sitting up in his bed, for he was beginning to move himself about again, intoning in a falsetto voice the praises of the Eternal Father, of Mary, and of the Holy Ghost, while the stout, good sister, standing at his feet, beat time with one finger as she gave him the key. As soon as he could walk, the Mother Superior offered to keep him a little longer to sing the offices in the chapel, serve at Mass, and act as sacristan. He accepted. And for a whole month he could be seen, clad in a white surplice, limping slightly, intoning responses and psalms with such graceful bendings of the head that the number of the faithful grew, and people deserted the parish church to attend Vespers at the hospital.

But as everything comes to an end in this world, it became necessary to dismiss him when he was quite cured. The Mother Superior, by way of thanking him, made him a present of twenty-five francs.

As soon as Pavilly found himself in the street with this money in his pocket, he wondered what he should do. Return to the village? Certainly not before he had a drink, a pleasure long unknown, and he entered a café. He did not come to the town more than once or twice a year, and he cherished, of one of those visits in particular, a confused and intoxicating remembrance of a debauch.

So he ordered a glass of cognac, which he swallowed at a gulp to lubricate his throat, then he poured down another to enjoy the taste of it.

As soon as the brandy, strong and fiery, had touched his palate and his tongue, reawakening, the more sharply because of his long abstinence the well-loved and desired sensation of alcohol, caressing, stinging, spicing and burning his mouth, he realised that he would drink the whole bottle, and he asked at once what it would cost, in order to save money on the separate glasses. They charged it to him at three francs, which he paid, then he set himself to get drunk quickly.

He set about it with a certain method, however, being desirous of retaining enough sensibility to enjoy other pleasures. So as soon as he felt himself on the point of seeing the chimney-pieces nod, he got up and went away, with faltering steps, his bottle under his arm, in search of a brothel.

He found it, not without difficulty, after having inquired of a wagoner who did not know it, a postman who directed him wrongly, a baker who began to curse and call him an old pig, and, at last, a soldier who obligingly conducted him there, telling him to be sure and choose "the Queen."

Pavilly, although it was hardly noon, walked into this house of delights, where he was received by a servant who tried to turn him out. But he made her laugh by a grimace, showed her three francs, the ordinary price for the special entertainments of the place, and followed her with some difficulty up a very dark staircase which led to the first floor.

When he found himself in a room, he called for "the

Queen," and awaited her, swallowing another drink from the bottle.

The door opened, a girl appeared. She was tall, plump, red-faced, enormous. With an unerring glance, the glance of a connoisseur, she took the measure of the drunkard sprawling on a chair, and said to him :

" Aren't you ashamed to come at this time ? "

He stammered :

" Why, princess ? "

" Disturbing a lady before she's even had her meal."

He tried to laugh.

" There's no time to a brave man."

" There's no time for getting tipsy, neither, old pint-pot ! "

Pavilly lost his temper.

" I'm not a pint-pot, to begin with, and I'm not tipsy neither."

" Not tipsy ! "

" No, I'm not tipsy."

" Not tipsy, you couldn't stand on your feet even ! "

She regarded him with the savage anger of a woman whose companions are all dining.

He got himself up.

" Look at me, I'll dance a polka, I will."

And to prove his stability, he climbed on a chair, made a pirouette, and jumped on the bed, where his great muddy shoes plastered two frightful stains.

" Oh, you dirty beast," cried the girl.

Rushing at him, she drove her fist in his stomach, giving him such a blow that Pavilly lost his balance, see-sawed over the foot of the couch, turned a complete somersault and fell back on the chest of drawers, dragging with him basin and water-jug ; then he rolled on the ground, uttering wild shouts.

The noise was so violent and his cries so piercing that the whole house came running, Monsieur, Madame, the servants, and all the members of the establishment.

Monsieur tried at first to pick the man up, but as soon as he had got him on his feet, the peasant lost his balance again, then began yelling that he had broken his leg, the other leg, the good one, the good one !

It was true. They ran to fetch a doctor. It was the very doctor who had attended Pavilly at Farmer Le Hariveau's.

"What, is it you again ?" said he.

"What's the matter with you ?"

"It's the other leg that's got broken, too, doctor."

"How did it happen, my man ?"

"A wench."

Every one was listening. The girls in their loose wrappers, their mouths still greasy from their interrupted meal, Madame furious, Monsieur uneasy.

"This is going to look bad," said the doctor. "You know that the Town Council regards you with small favour. You'll have to contrive to keep this business from getting about."

"What's to be done ?" asked Monsieur.

"Well, the best thing to do would be to send this man to the hospital, which he's just left, by the way, and pay for his treatment."

Monsieur answered :

"I'd much rather pay than have a scandal."

So, half an hour later, Pavilly returned, drunk and moaning, to the dormitory he had left an hour earlier.

The Mother Superior flung up her arms, grieved because she was very fond of him, and smiling because she was not displeased to see him again.

"Well, my good man, what's the matter with you ?"

"The other leg broken, sister dear."

"Oh, so you've been climbing on loads of straw again, have you, you old mountebank ?"

And Pavilly, confused and shy, stammered :

"No . . . no . . . Not this time . . . not this time . . ."

No . . . no. . . . It's not my fault . . . not my fault. . . . It was a straw mattress did it."

She could not get any other explanation of the affair, and never knew that her twenty-five francs were responsible for this relapse.



A DIVORCE CASE

MME CHASSEL'S COUNSEL BEGAN HIS SPEECH: MY LORD, gentlemen of the jury, the case which I am called on to defend before you would more suitably be treated by medicine than by justice and constitutes much more a pathological case than an ordinary case of law. At first sight the facts seem simple.

A young man, of considerable wealth, of a high-minded and ardent nature, a generous heart, falls in love with a supremely beautiful young girl, more than beautiful, adorable, as gracious, as charming, as good, and as tender as she is pretty, and he marries her.

For some time, he conducts himself towards her as a solicitous and affectionate husband; then he neglects her, bullies her, seems to feel for her an insurmountable aversion, an unconquerable dislike. One day even, he strikes her, not only without any right, but even without any excuse.

I will not labour to represent to you, gentlemen, his strange behaviour, incomprehensible to every one. I will not paint for you the unspeakable life of these two creatures and the frightful grief of this young woman.

To convince you I have only to read to you some fragments from a diary written each day by this poor man, this poor madman. For it is with a madman that we have to do, gentlemen, and the case is all the more curious, all the more interesting in that it recalls in many particulars the mania of the unfortunate prince who died recently, the fantastic king who reigned platonically in Bavaria. I will recall that case: the madness of a romantic.

You will remember all the tales told of that strange prince. He had built in the heart of the most magnificent scenery in

his kingdom veritable fairy castles. Even the reality of the beauty of things and places was not enough for him, he imagined and created in these fantastic dwellings artificial horizons produced by means of theatrical devices, changes of scene, painted forests, fabled demesnes where the leaves of the trees were of precious stones. He had alps and glaciers, steppes, sandy deserts scorched by the sun; and at night, under the rays of the real moon, lakes illuminated below by fantastic electric lights. On these lakes swans floated and small boats glided, while an orchestra composed of the finest musicians in the world intoxicated the royal madman's senses with romance.

This man was chaste, this man was a virgin. He had never loved anything save a dream, his dream, his divine dream.

One evening he carried off in his boat a young woman, a great artiste, and begged her to sing. She sang, herself intoxicated by the beauty of the country-side, by the warm, sweet air, by the fragrance of flowers and by the ecstasy of this young, handsome prince.

She sang, as women sing whom love has touched, then, distraught, trembling wildly, she fell on the king's heart and sought his lips.

But he threw her in the lake, and taking up his oars, gained the shore, without troubling whether she were rescued or not.

Gentlemen of the jury, we have before us a case in all respects similar. I will do no more than read to you now some passages from the diary which we discovered in the drawer of a bureau.

How dull and ugly everything is, always the same, always hideous! How I dream of a lovelier, nobler, more changeable world! How wretched would be the imagination of their God, if their God existed or if he had not created other things, elsewhere.

Always woods, little woods, rivers that are like all other

rivers, plains like all other plains, all things are alike and monotonous. And man! . . . Man? . . . What a horrible animal, wicked, proud and disgusting!

.

One should love, love madly, without seeing the object of one's love. For to see is to understand, and to understand is to despise. One should love, intoxicating oneself with the beloved as one gets drunk on wine, in such a way as to lose consciousness of what one is drinking. And drink, drink, drink, without drawing breath, day and night.

.

I have found her, I think. She has in all her person something ideal that seems not of this world and lends wings to my dream. Oh, how far otherwise than in reality do people seem to me in my dreams! She is fair, very fair, with hair full of inexpressible delicate shades. Her eyes are blue. Blue eyes are the only ones that ravish my soul. The whole being of a woman, the woman who exists in the depths of my heart, shows itself to me in the eye, only in the eye.

Oh, a mystery! What mystery? The eye? . . . The whole universe lies therein, because it sees it, because it reflects it. It contains the universe, things and beings, forests and oceans, men and beasts, sunsets, stars, the arts, all, all, it sees, plucks, and bears everything away; and it holds still more, it holds the soul, it holds the thinking man, the man who loves, who laughs, who suffers. Oh, look into the blue eyes of women; they are deep as the sea, changing as the sky, so sweet, so sweet, sweet as gentle winds, sweet as music, sweet as kisses, transparent, so clear that one sees behind, one sees the soul, the blue soul that colours them, that animates them, that makes them divine.

Yes, the soul shares the colours of the glance. Only the

blue soul bears the dream in its depths, it has stolen its azure from sea and space.

The eye ! Think of it ! The eye ! It drinks in the visible creation to feed thought. It drinks in the world, colour, movement, books, pictures, all beauty, all ugliness, and creates ideas therefrom. And when it looks at me, it fills me with the sense of a happiness not of this world. It foreshadows to us the things of which we are for ever ignorant ; it makes us realise that the realities of our thoughts are despicable and filthy things.

.

I love her too for her manner of walking.

" Même quand l'oiseau marche, on sent qu'il a des ailes,"

the poet said.

When she passes, one feels that she is not of the same race as ordinary women, she is of a finer, more divine race.

I marry her to-morrow. . . . I am afraid. . . . I am afraid of so many things.

.

Two beasts, two dogs, two wolves, two foxes, prowl through the woods and meet. The one is male, the other female. They mate. They mate because of an animal instinct which drives them to continue the race, their race, the race whose form, skin, stature, movements and habits they have.

All beasts do as much, without knowing why !

We too. . . .

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All that I have done in marrying her is to obey this senseless urge that drives us towards the female.

She is my wife. So long as I desired her ideally, she was for me the unrealisable dream on the verge of being realised.

From the very second when I held her in my arms, she was no more than the being of whom Nature has made use to bring to naught all my hopes.

Has she brought them to naught? No. Yet I am tired of her, so tired that I cannot touch her, brush her with my hand or my lips, without my heart swelling with an inexpressible disgust, not perhaps disgust with her, but a loftier, wider, more contemptuous disgust, disgust with the embrace of love, so vile as it has become for all refined beings, a shameful act which must be hidden, which is only spoken of in low tones, with blushes. . . .

I can no longer endure the sight of my wife approaching me, calling to me with smile and glance and arms. I can no longer endure it. I imagined once that her kiss would transport me to the heavens. One day she was suffering from a passing fever, and I caught in her breath the faint, subtle, almost imperceptible odour of human decay. I was utterly overcome!

Oh! flesh, seductive living dung, decay that walks, thinks, speaks, looks and smiles, full of fermenting food, rosy, pretty, tempting, deceitful as the soul. . . .

Why is it only the flowers that smell so good, the great pale or brilliant flowers, whose tones and hues make my heart flutter and trouble my eyes? They are so beautiful, so delicate in structure, so varied and so sensual, half-open like mouths, more tempting than mouths, and hollow, with lips curled back, toothed, fleshy, powdered with a seed of life that engenders in each one of them a different perfume.

They reproduce themselves, they, only they, in all the world, without defilement of their inviolable race, giving off round themselves the divine incense of their love, the fragrant sweat of their caresses, the essence of their incomparable bodies, of their bodies that are adorned with all grace, all elegance, all

form, and possess the fascination of all colour forms ; and the intoxicating charm of all scents. . . .

Selected fragments, six months later.

. . . I love flowers, not as flowers but as delicate and material beings ; I pass my days and my nights in the greenhouses where I hide them like women in harems.

Who, except myself, knows the sweetness, the maddening charm, the shuddering, sensual, ideal, superhuman ecstasy of these tender caresses ; and these kisses on rosy flesh, on red flesh, on white flesh, the miraculously varied, delicate, rare, fine, unctuous flesh of these wonderful flowers ?

I have greenhouses where no one enters but myself and the gardener.

I enter them as if I were stepping into a place of secret delight. In the high glass gallery, I pass first between two throngs of corollas, shut, half-open or spread wide, which slope from ground to roof. It is the first kiss they send me.

Those flowers, those that adorn this anteroom of my mysterious passions, are my servants and not my favourites.

They greet me, as I pass, with their changing brilliance and their fresh exhalations. They are darlings, coquettes, rising tier upon tier in eight rows on my right hand and eight rows on my left, and so crowded that they look like two gardens coming down to my feet.

My heart palpitates, my eye lights up at sight of them, the blood runs madly through my veins, my soul leaps within me, and my hands tremble already with the desire to touch them. I pass on. There are three closed doors at the end of this high gallery. I can make my choice. I have three harems.

But I turn oftenest to the orchids, my drowsy favourites. Their room is low, stifling. The damp, warm air makes my skin moist, my throat contract for want of air, and my fingers

tremble. They come, these stranger women, from swampy, burning, unhealthy countries. They are fascinating as sirens, deadly as poison, marvellously grotesque, soul-destroying, terrifying. Some are like butterflies, with their enormous wings, their tiny paws, their eyes. For they have eyes. They look at me, they see me, prodigious, unbelievable beings, fairies, daughters of the holy earth, the impalpable air, and warm light, the mother of the world. Yes, they have wings and eyes and delicate shades that no painter can catch, all the charms, all the graces, all the shapes imaginable. Their sides are cleft, perfumed and transparent, open for love and more tempting than any woman's flesh. The unimaginable contours of their tiny bodies thrust the intoxicated soul into a paradise of visions and ideal delights. They quiver on their stems as if about to take flight. Will they fly, will they come to me? No, it is my heart which hovers above them like some mystic male creature, tortured with love.

No insect's wing can brush them. We are alone, they and I, in the translucent prison that I have built them. I watch them and I contemplate them, I admire them, I adore them, one after the other.

How sleek they are, how mysterious, rosy, with a rosiness that moistens the lips with desire. How I love them! The rim of their calyx is curled, paler than their throats, and the corolla hides itself there, mysterious, seductive mouth, sweet to the tongue and displaying and concealing the delicate, wonderful and sacred organs of these divine little creatures which smell pleasant and do not talk.

Sometimes I am seized with a passion for one of them which endures as long as its existence, a few days, a few nights. Then it is taken from the common gallery and enclosed in a darling little glass retreat where a thread of water murmurs through a bed of tropic grass come from the islands of the great Pacific. And there I stay, at her side, ardent, feverish and tormented, knowing her death so close and watching her

fade, while I possess her, while I breathe, drink, pluck her short life with one inexpressible caress.

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When he had finished reading these fragments, counsel continued :

Decency, gentlemen of the jury, restrains me from continuing to lay before you the curious confessions of this shamefully idealistic madman. The few passages that I have just laid before you will be sufficient, I think, for you to understand this case of mental disease, less rare than one might think in our age of hysterical dementia and corrupted decadence.

I feel therefore that my client is entitled more than any other woman to demand her divorce in the exceptional position in which she has been placed by the strange mental derangement of her husband.

WHO KNOWS ?

I

MY GOD ! MY GOD ! SO AT LAST I AM GOING TO WRITE down what has happened to me. But shall I be able to ? Shall I dare ?—so fantastic, so inexplicable, so incomprehensible, so crazy is it.

If I were not certain of what I had seen, certain that there has been no faulty link in my reasoning, no error in my investigations, no lacuna in the relentless sequence of my observations, I would have believed myself merely the victim of an hallucination, the sport of a strange vision. After all, who knows ?

I am to-day in a private asylum ; but I entered it voluntarily, urged thereto by prudence, and fear. Only one living creature knows my story. The doctor here. I am going to write it. I hardly know why. To rid myself of it, for it fills my thoughts like an unendurable nightmare.

Here it is :

I have always been a recluse, a dreamer, a sort of detached philosopher, full of kindly feeling, content with little, with no bitterness against men or resentment against heaven. I lived alone, all my life, because of a sort of uneasiness that the presence of other people induces in me. How can I explain it ? I could not explain it. I don't refuse to see people, to talk to them, to dine with friends, but when I have endured their nearness for some time, even those with whom I am most intimate, they weary me, exhaust me, get on my nerves, and I suffer an increasing, exasperating longing to see them go or to go myself, to be alone.

This longing is more than a desire, it is an irresistible necessity. And if I had to endure the continued presence of the people in whose company I was, if I were compelled, not to listen but to go on for any length of time hearing their conversation, some accident would certainly befall me. What? Ah, who knows? Perhaps merely a fainting fit? Yes, probably that!

I have such a passion for solitude that I cannot even endure the nearness of other people sleeping under my roof: I cannot live in Paris because of the indefinable distress I feel there. I endure spiritual death, and I am tortured, too, in my body and my nerves by the vast crowd that swarms and lives round me, even when it sleeps. Ah, the slumber of others is more unendurable to me than their speech! And I can never rest when at the other side of the wall I am aware of lives held in suspense by these regular eclipses of consciousness.

Why am I so made? Who knows? The cause is perhaps quite simple. I am quickly wearied of all that exists outside myself. And there are many like me.

There are two races on earth. Those who need others, who are distracted, occupied and refreshed by others, who are worried, exhausted and unnerved by solitude as by the ascension of a terrible glacier or the crossing of a desert; and those, on the other hand, who are wearied, bored, embarrassed, utterly fatigued by others, while isolation calms them, and the detachment and imaginative activity of their minds bathes them in peace.

In fact, this is a usual psychical phenomenon. Some people are made to live an outward life, others to live within themselves. I myself have a short and quickly exhausted power of attention to the outside world, and as soon as it has reached its limit, I suffer in my whole body and my whole mind an intolerable distress.

The result is that I attach myself, that I attached myself strongly to inanimate things, that assume for me the importance

of living creatures, and that my house has become, had become, a world where I lived a solitary and active life, surrounded by things, furniture, intimate trifles, as sympathetic to my eyes as faces. I had filled it with them little by little. I had decorated it with them, and I felt myself housed, content, satisfied, as happy as in the arms of a loving woman whose familiar caress was become a calm and pleasant need.

I had had this house built in a beautiful garden which shut it off from the roads, and within reach of a town where I could, when occasion arose, find the social resources to which, at odd moments, I felt impelled. All my servants slept in a distant building at the end of the kitchen-garden, which was surrounded by a great wall. The sombre folding down of the nights, in the silence of my habitation, lost, hidden, drowned under the leaves of great trees, was so tranquillising, so pleasant to me, that every evening I delayed going to bed for several hours, to enjoy it the longer.

That particular day, *Sigurd* had been played at the local theatre. It was the first time I had heard this beautiful, fairy-like musical drama, and it had given me the greatest pleasure.

I walked home, at a brisk pace, my head full of sounding rhythms, my eyes filled with visions of loveliness. It was dark, dark, so unfathomably dark that I could hardly make out the high road and several times almost went headlong into the ditch. From the toll-gate to my house is about two-thirds of a mile, perhaps a little more, maybe about twenty minutes' slow walking. It was one o'clock in the morning, one or half-past; the sky grew faintly light in front of me, and a slip of a moon rose, the wan slip of the moon's last quarter. The crescent moon of the first quarter, that rises at four or five o'clock in the evening, is brilliant, gay, gleaming like silver, but the moon that rises after midnight is tawny, sad and sinister: it is a real witches' Sabbath of a moon. Every walker by night must have made this observation. The moon of the first quarter, be it thin as a thread, sends out a small, joyous

light that fills the heart with gladness and flings clear shadows over the earth; the moon of the last quarter scarcely spreads a dying light, so wan that it hardly casts any shadow at all.

I saw from some way off the sombre mass of my garden, and, sprung from I know not where, there came to me a certain uneasiness at the idea of entering it. I slackened my step. It was very mild. The heavy clump of trees looked like a tomb in which my house was buried.

I opened my gateway and made my way down the long avenue of sycamores which led to the house, arched and vaulted overhead like a high tunnel, crossing shadowy groves and winding round lawns where under the paling shadows clumps of flowers jewelled the ground with oval stains of indeterminate hues.

As I approached the house, a strange uneasiness took possession of me. I halted. There was no sound. There was not a breath of air in the leaves. "What's the matter with me?" I thought. For ten years I had entered in like manner without feeling the faintest shadow of disquietude. I was not afraid. I have never been afraid at night. The sight of a man, a marauder, a thief, would have filled me with fury, and I would have leaped on him without a moment's hesitation. Besides, I was armed. I had my revolver. But I did not touch it, for I wished to master this sense of terror that was stirring in me.

What was it? A presentiment? The mysterious presentiment that takes possession of one's senses when they are on the verge of seeing the inexplicable? Perhaps? Who knows?

With every step I advanced, I felt my skin creep, and when I was standing under the wall of my vast house, with its closed shutters, I felt the need of waiting a few moments before opening the door and going inside. So I sat down on a bench under the windows of my drawing-room. I remained there, a little shaken, my head leaning against the wall, my eyes open on the shadows of the trees. During these first instants, I noticed nothing unusual round me. I felt a sort of droning

sound in my ears, but that often happened to me. It sometimes seems to me that I hear trains passing, that I hear clocks striking, that I hear the footsteps of a crowd.

Then shortly, these droning sounds became more distinct, more differentiated, more recognisable. I had been mistaken. It was not the usual throbbing sound of my pulse that filled my ears with these clamourings, but a very peculiar, though very confused noise that came, no doubt about it, from the interior of my house.

I made it out through the wall, this continuous noise, which was rather a disturbance than a noise, a confused movement of a crowd of things, as if all my furniture was being pushed, moved out of its place and gently dragged about.

For an appreciable time longer I doubted the evidence of my ears. But when I had pressed myself against a shutter the better to make out this strange disturbance of my house, I became convinced, certain, that something abnormal and incomprehensible was taking place in my house. I was not afraid but I was—how shall I say it?—stunned with astonishment. I did not draw my revolver—feeling quite sure that I should not need it. I waited.

I waited a long time, unable to come to any decision, my mind quite lucid, but wildly anxious. I waited, standing there, listening the whole time to the noise, that went on increasing: at times it rose to a violent pitch, and seemed to become a muttering of impatience, of anger, of a mysterious tumult.

Then suddenly, ashamed of my cowardice, I seized my bunch of keys, I chose the one I wanted, I thrust it in the lock, I turned it twice, and pushing the door with all my force, I sent the door clattering against the inner wall.

The crash rang out like a pistol shot, and, amazingly, from top to bottom of my house, a formidable uproar broke out in answer to this explosive sound. It was so sudden, so terrible, so deafening, that I recoiled some steps and although I still felt it to be useless, I drew my revolver from its holster.

I went on waiting, oh, not long. I could distinguish, now, an extraordinary tap-tapping on the steps of my staircase, on the floors, on the carpets, a tap-tapping, not of shoes, of slippers worn by human beings, but of crutches, wooden crutches, and iron crutches that rang out like cymbals. And then all at once I saw, on the threshold of my door, an arm-chair, my big reading-chair, come swaggering out. It set off through the garden. Others followed it, the chairs out of my drawing-room, then the low couches dragging themselves along like crocodiles on their short legs, then all my chairs, leaping like goats, and the little stools trotting along like hares.

Imagine the tumult of my mind ! I slipped into a grove of trees, where I stayed, crouched, watching the whole time this march past of my furniture, for they were all taking their departure, one after the other, quickly or slowly, according to their shapes and weight. My piano, my large grand, passed galloping like a runaway horse, with a murmur of music in its depths ; the smallest objects glided over the gravel like ants, brushes, glass dishes, goblets, where the moonlight hung glow-worm lamps. The hangings slithered past in whorls, like octopuses. I saw my writing-table appear, a rare piece of the last century, which contained all the letters I have received, the whole story of my heart, an old story which caused me so much suffering. And it held photographs too.

Suddenly, I was no longer afraid, I flung myself on it and seized it as one seizes a thief, as one seizes a flying woman ; but it pursued its irresistible course, and in spite of my efforts, in spite of my anger, I could not even retard its progress. As I struggled desperately against this terrible force, I fell on the ground, still wrestling with it. Then it tumbled me over, dragged me over the gravel, and the pieces of furniture that were following it began to walk over me, trampling over my legs and bruising them ; then, when I had loosed my hold of it, the others passed over my body like a cavalry charge over a dismounted soldier.

Mad with fear at last, I managed to drag myself out of the main avenue and to hide myself again among the trees, to watch the disappearance of the meanest, smallest, most overlooked by me, most insignificant objects that had belonged to me.

Then far away, in my house, now full of echoing sounds as empty houses are, I heard the dreadful sound of shutting doors. They clashed shut from top to bottom of the building, until the hall door that I myself, in my mad folly, had opened for their flight, had finally shut itself, last of all.

I fled too, running towards the town, and I did not recover my self-control until I was in the streets, and meeting belated wayfarers. I went and rang at the door of a hotel where I was known. I had beaten my clothes with my hands to remove the dust, and I explained that I had lost my bunch of keys which contained also the key of the kitchen-garden, where my servants were sleeping in a house isolated behind the enclosing wall that preserved my fruit and my vegetables from marauding visitors.

I buried myself up to my eyes in the bed they gave me. But I could not sleep, and I waited for daybreak, listening to the beating of my heart. I had given orders that my people were to be warned at dawn, and my man knocked on my door at seven o'clock in the morning.

His face seemed convulsed with emotion.

"A terrible thing happened last night, sir," he said.

"What's that?"

"The whole furniture of the house has been stolen, sir, everything, everything, down to the very smallest articles."

This news pleased me. Why? Who knows? I had myself absolutely in hand, absolutely determined to dissimulate, to say nothing to anyone about what I had seen, to hide it: bury it in my conscience like a frightful secret. I answered:

"They must be the same people who stole my keys. We must warn the police at once. I will get up and be with you in a few moments."

The investigations lasted five months. They discovered nothing, they did not find the smallest of my possessions, not the faintest trace of the thieves. Lord ! if I had told what I knew. If I had told . . . they would have shut me up, me, not the robbers, but the man who had been able to see such a thing.

Oh, I know enough to hold my tongue. But I did not refurnish my house. It was quite useless. The thing would have happened again and gone on happening. I did not want to enter the house again. I did not enter it. I never saw it again.

I went to Paris, to a hotel, and I consulted doctors on my nervous state, which had been giving me much uneasiness since that deplorable night.

They ordered me to travel. I followed their advice.

II

I began by travelling in Italy. The sun did me good. For six months, I wandered from Genoa to Venice, Venice to Florence, Florence to Rome, Rome to Naples. Then I went over Sicily, a country alike notable for its climate and its monuments, relics of the Greek and Norman occupation. I went over to Africa, I peacefully crossed the huge, calm, yellow desert over which camels, gazelles and vagabond Arabs wander, and nothing haunts the light, crystalline air, either by night or day.

I returned to France by Marseilles, and despite the Provençal gaiety, the dimmer light of the sky saddened me. I felt, on returning to the Continent, the strange sensation of a sick man who believed himself cured and is warned by a dull pain that his malady is not yet quite extinct.

Then I came back to Paris. A month later, I was bored with it. It was autumn, and before winter came on, I wanted to make an expedition across Normandy, which I did not know.

I began at Rouen, of course, and for a week I wandered ecstatically, enthusiastically, through this mediæval city, in this amazing mirror of extraordinary Gothic monuments.

One afternoon, about four o'clock, as I was entering an extraordinary street, in which a stream flows, black as ink, which they call "Robec Water," my attention, which was wholly fixed on the bizarre and antiquated character of the houses, was suddenly distracted by a glimpse of a line of second-hand dealers' shops which succeeded each other from door to door.

How well they had chosen their pitch, these obscene traffickers in rubbish, in this fantastic alley, perched above the evil water-course, beneath the roofs bristling with tiles and slates on which the weather-cocks of bygone days still creaked!

Higgledy-piggledy in the depths of those dark shops, could be seen carved presses, Rouen, Neders, Moustiers pottery, painted statues, others in oak, Christs, Virgins, saints, church ornaments, chasubles, copes, even chalices, and a painted shrine from which the Almighty had decamped. Curious, are they not? these caverns in these tall houses, in these huge towns, filled from cellar to attic with every kind of article whose existence seemed ended, which outlived their natural owners, their century, their period, their fashion, to be bought by new generations as curiosities.

My weakness for trinkets reawakened in this stronghold of antiquaries. I went from stall to stall, crossing in two strides the bridges made of four rotten planks thrown across the nauseous Robec Water.

Heavens! What a shock! One of my most handsome wardrobes met my eyes at the end of a vault crowded with articles, looking like the entrance to the catacombs of a cemetery for old furniture. I drew nearer, trembling in every limb, trembling so much that I dared not touch it. I put out my hand, I hesitated. It was really it, after all: a unique Louis XIII wardrobe, easily recognisable by anyone who had ever seen it. Suddenly casting my eyes a little further, into the deeper

shadows of the gallery, I caught sight of three of my arm-chairs, covered with *petit point* tapestry ; then, still further back, my two Henri II tables, so rare that people came from Paris to look at them.

Think ! Think of my state of mind !

I went on, aghast, tortured with emotion, still, I went forward, for I am a brave man, as a knight of the Dark Ages thrust his way into a nest of sorcery. Step by step, I found everything which had belonged to me, my chandeliers, my books, my pictures, my hangings, my armours, everything except the desk full of my letters, which I could see nowhere.

I went on, climbing down dim galleries, climbing up to higher floors. I was alone. I shouted ; no one answered. I was alone ; there was no one in this vast house, tortuous as a maze.

Night fell, and I had to sit down in the shadows on one of my own chairs, for I would not go away. From time to time I called : " Hallo ! Hallo ! Is anyone there ? "

I must have been there for certainly more than an hour when I heard steps, light, slow footsteps, I don't know where. I was on the point of fleeing, but taking heart, I called once more and saw a light in an adjoining room.

" Who is there ? " said a voice.

I replied : " A customer."

The answer came :

" It is very late to come into shops like this."

" I have been waiting for more than an hour," I returned.

" You could come back to-morrow ! "

" To-morrow, I shall have left Rouen."

I dared not go forward, and he did not come. All the time, I was watching the reflection of his light on a tapestry on which two angels hovered above the bodies on a battle-field. It, too, belonged to me. I said :

" Well ! Are you coming ? "

He answered :

" I am waiting for you."

I rose and went towards him.

In the middle of a large room stood a tiny man, tiny and very fat, fat as a freak, a hideous freak.

He had a thin, straggling beard, thin-grown and yellowish, and not a hair on his head. Not a hair ! As he held his candle at arm's length to see me the better, his skull looked to me like a little moon in this vast room cluttered with old furniture. His face was wrinkled and swollen, his eyes scarcely visible.

I bargained for three chairs, which were mine, and paid a big price for them on the spot, giving only the number of my room at the hotel. They were to be delivered before nine o'clock on the following morning.

Then I went out. He accompanied me politely to the door.

I at once went to the head police station, where I related the story of the theft of my furniture and of the discovery I had just made.

He immediately asked for information by telegram from the Department which had had charge of the burglary, asking me to wait for the reply. An hour later a quite satisfactory answer arrived.

"I shall have this man arrested and questioned at once," the chief told me, "for he may possibly have been suspicious and made away with your belongings. If you dine and come back in a couple of hours, I will have him here and make him undergo a fresh examination in your presence."

"Most certainly, sir. My warmest thanks. . . ."

I went to my hotel and dined with a better appetite than I could have believed possible. Still, I was contented enough. They had him. Two hours later I went back to the chief inspector, who was waiting for me.

"Well, sir," he said, as soon as he saw me, "they haven't found your man. My fellows haven't been able to put their hands on him !"

"Ah !" I felt that I should faint. "But . . . you have found his house all right ?" I asked.

"Quite. It will be watched and held until he comes back. But as for himself, vanished !"

"Vanished ?"

"Vanished. Usually he spends the evenings with his neighbour, herself a dealer, a queer old witch, Widow Bidoin. She has not seen him this evening and can give no information about him. We must wait till to-morrow."

I departed. How sinister, how disturbing, how haunted the streets of Rouen seemed to me !

I slept badly enough, with nightmares to drag me out of each bout of sleep. As I did not want to appear either too worried or in too much haste, I waited on the following day until ten o'clock before going to the police station.

The dealer had not appeared. His shop was still shut.

The inspector said to me :

"I have taken all the necessary steps. The Department has charge of the affair ; we will go off together to this shop and have it opened, and you shall point out your belongings to me."

We were driven there in a carriage. Some policemen with a locksmith were posted in front of the shop door, which stood open.

When I entered, I found neither my wardrobe, my arm-chairs, nor my tables, nor anything—nothing of what had furnished my house—absolutely nothing, even though on the previous evening I could not move a step without meeting one of my pieces.

The inspector, surprised, at first looked at me with distrust.

"Good God, sir !" I said, "the disappearance of this furniture coincides amazingly with the disappearance of the dealer."

He smiled :

"True enough. You were wrong to buy and pay for those things of yours yesterday. It put him on his guard !"

I replied :

"What seems incomprehensible to me is that all the places where my furniture stood are now occupied by other pieces !"

"Oh," answered the inspector, "he had the whole night, and accomplices too, no doubt. This house probably communicates with its neighbours. Never mind, sir, I am going to move very quickly in this matter. This rogue won't keep out of our hands very long, now we hold his retreat!"

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Ah, my heart, my poor heart, how it was beating.

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I stayed in Rouen for a fortnight. The man did not return. My God! My God! Is there any man alive who could confound, could overreach him? Then on the morning of the sixteenth day, I received from my gardener, the caretaker of my pillaged and still empty house, the following strange letter:

SIR,—

I beg to inform you that last night there occurred something which no one can fathom, the police no more than ourselves. All the furniture has come back, everything without exception, down to the very smallest objects. The house is now exactly the same as it was on the night of the burglary. It is enough to drive one off one's head. It happened during the night of Friday-Saturday. The drive is cut up as if they had dragged everything from the gate to the door—exactly as it was on the day of the disappearance.

We await you, sir, while remaining,

Your obedient servant,

PHILIPPE RAUDIN.

Ah, no, no, no, no! I will never go back there!

I took the letter to the police inspector.

"This restitution has been made very skilfully," he said. "Let's pretend to do nothing now. We'll catch our man one of those days."

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But he is not caught. No. They haven't got him, and I am as afraid of him now as if he was a wild beast lurking behind me.

Not to be found ! He is not to be found, this moon-headed monster. Never will he be caught. He will never again come back to his house. What does that matter to him ! I am the only person who could confront him, and I will not.

I will not ! I will not ! I will not !

And if he returns, if he comes back to his shop, who could prove that my furniture was in his place ? Mine is the only evidence against him ; and I am well aware that it is regarded with suspicion.

Oh, no, such a life was no longer bearable. And I could not keep the secret of what I had seen. I could not go on living like anyone else with the dread that such happenings would begin again.

I went to see the doctor in charge of this private asylum, and told him the whole story.

After questioning me for a long time, he said :

" Would you be willing to remain here for some time ? "

" Very willing. "

" You have means ? "

" Yes. "

" You would like separate quarters ? "

" Yes. "

" Would you care to see friends ? "

" No, not a soul. The man from Rouen might dare, for vengeance' sake, to follow me here. "

And I have been alone, alone, quite alone, for three months. I am almost at peace. I have only one fear. . . . Suppose the antique-dealer went mad . . . and suppose they brought him to this retreat. . . . The prisons themselves are not safe. . . .

ALEXANDER

AT FOUR O'CLOCK THAT DAY, AS USUAL, ALEXANDER CAME round to the front of Maramballe's little house with the three-wheeled invalid carriage in which, by the doctor's orders, he took his helpless old mistress out until six o'clock every day.

When he had propped the light carriage against the step at the exact spot from which he could easily help the stout old lady in, he returned to the house and soon an angry voice was heard—a hoarse, old soldier's voice—cursing : it was the voice of the master of the house, Captain Joseph Maramballe, formerly of the infantry.

Then followed a noise of slammed doors, upset chairs and hasty footsteps, then a silence ; and after a few moments, Alexander appeared in the doorway, holding up Mme Maramballe with all his strength, for the walk downstairs had quite exhausted the old lady. When, after a certain amount of trouble, she had been settled in the wheeled chair, Alexander took hold of the handle at the back and started off in the direction of the river-bank.

This was their usual way of crossing the small town, through which they passed amid respectful greetings that were addressed, perhaps, as much to the servant as to the old lady, for if she was loved and looked up to by every one, he, this old trooper with his white, patriarchal beard, was considered the model servant.

The July sun shone down into the streets with cruel violence, bathing the low houses in a light made sad by its power and crudity. Dogs were asleep on the pavement in the line of shadow thrown by the walls, and Alexander, rather out of breath, hurried to reach the avenue that led to the bank of the river, as quickly as possible.

Mme Maramballe dozed under her white parasol, the point of which swayed to and fro against the man's impassive face.

As they reached the avenue of limes, whose shade thoroughly woke her up, she said good-naturedly :

"Not so fast, my good fellow, you will kill yourself in this heat."

It never occurred to the kind-hearted woman, in her candid selfishness, that she now wanted to go slower because she had reached the shelter of the leaves.

Near the road over which the old limes formed an arch, the winding Navette flowed between two willow-hedges. The chuckle of the eddies, of water splashing over the rocks and of the sudden twists of the current, cast over the promenade a low song of moving water that mingled with the freshness of the moisture-laden air.

When she had thoroughly breathed and savoured the green, cool charm of the place, Mme Maramballe said :

"Now I feel better. But he got out of bed the wrong side this morning."

Alexander replied :

"Indeed he did, Madame."

He had been in their service for thirty-five years, first as officer's orderly, then as an ordinary valet, having been unwilling to leave his master ; now for six years he had wheeled his mistress every afternoon through the narrow roads round the town.

This long, devoted service, and then this daily companionship had established a certain familiarity between the old lady and the old servant, affectionate on her part, deferential on his.

They discussed household affairs as between equals. Their chief subject of conversation and of anxiety was the captain's bad temper, embittered by a long career that had opened brilliantly, run its course without promotion, and ended without glory.

Mme Maramballe resumed the conversation :

"Yes, he certainly got out of bed the wrong side, it has happened too often since he left the army."

With a sigh Alexander completed his mistress's thought :

"Oh! Madame may say that it happens to him every day, and did even before he left the army."

"That is true. But he has had no luck, the poor man. He started by an act of bravery for which he was decorated when only twenty, then from the age of twenty to that of fifty he never rose higher than the rank of captain, although at the start he had counted on being at least a colonel when he retired."

"After all, Madame may say it is his own fault. Had he not always been about as gentle as a riding-whip, his superiors would have liked him better and used their influence in his favour. It's no good being cranky, you must please people if you want to get on."

"That he should treat us like that, well, that is our own fault, because it suits us to stay with him, but it is a different matter for others."

Mme Maramballe was thinking. Every day for years and years she had thought about the brutality of the man she married long ago, because he was a fine-looking officer, decorated quite young, with a brilliant future, so every one said. What mistakes one can make in life!

She said gently :

"Let us stop awhile, my poor Alexander, you must have a rest on your seat."

The seat was a small one, partly rotted away, placed at the turning of the avenue for the use of Sunday visitors. When they came this way Alexander always had a short rest on the seat.

He sat down, holding his fine, white, fan-shaped beard in his hands with a simple gesture full of pride; he grasped it tightly, then slid his closed fingers down to the bottom, which

he held over the pit of his stomach for a few minutes, as if he wanted to fasten it there, and show off the great length of his growth.

Mme Maramballe resumed :

"As for me, I married him : it is only just and natural that I should bear with his unkindness, but what I cannot understand is that you put up with it too, my good Alexander !"

He gave a slight shrug of his shoulders, saying :

"Oh, me . . . Madame."

She added :

"Really. I have often thought about it. You were his orderly when I married and could hardly do otherwise than put up with him. But since then, why have you stayed with us who pay so little and treat you so badly, when you might have done like others, settled down, married, had children, founded a family ?"

He repeated :

"Oh, me, Madame, that's another question." He stopped and began to pull his beard as if it were a bell ringing inside him, as if he wanted to pull it off ; the scared look in his eyes showed his embarrassment.

Mme Maramballe followed her own line of thought :

"You are not a peasant. You have been educated. . . ."

He interrupted her with pride :

"I studied to be a land-surveyor."

"Then why did you stay on with us, spoiling your life ?"

He stammered :

"Why ! Why ! It is a natural weakness of mine."

"What do you mean, a natural weakness ?"

"Yes, when I attach myself to anyone, I attach myself, that's the end of it."

She laughed.

"Come, you are not going to make me believe that Maramballe's kindness and gentleness have attached you to him for life."

Alexander moved restlessly about on the seat, visibly embarrassed, and mumbled into his long moustache :

"It's not him, it's you !"

The old lady, whose sweet face was crowned by a snow-white ridge of curly hair that shone like swan's feathers, carefully put into curl-papers every day, gave a start and looked at her servant with surprise in her eyes.

"Me, my poor Alexander ? How do you mean ?"

He looked up into the air first, then to one side, then into the distance, turning his head about as shy men do when forced to admit some shameful secret. Then with the courage of a soldier ordered into the firing-line, he said :

"It's like this. The first time I took a letter from the Lieutenant to Mademoiselle, and Mademoiselle smiled at me and gave me a franc, that settled the matter."

Not understanding, she insisted :

"Come, come, explain yourself."

Overcome by the terror of the criminal who knows that all is over when he confesses a crime, Alexander blurted out :

"I felt drawn towards Madame. There !"

She made no reply and did not look at him, while she turned this over in her mind. She was kind, straightforward, gentle, reasonable, and full of good feeling.

She thought, in an instant, how great was the devotion of this unfortunate man, who had given up everything to live near her, without saying a word. She wanted to cry.

"Let us go back," she said, looking serious, but was not angry.

He got up, walked round to the back of the wheeled chair and began to push it. As they approached the village they saw Captain Maramballe in the middle of the road, coming towards them.

As soon as he had joined them he said to his wife, obviously anxious to pick a quarrel :

"What is there for dinner ?"

"A chicken and flageolets."

He shouted indignantly :

"Chicken, chicken again, always chicken, damn it ! I have had enough of your chickens. Can't you think of anything else, must you always give me the same thing to eat every day ?"

Resignedly, she replied :

"But, my darling, you know the doctor ordered it. It is the best thing for your digestion. There are lots of things I dare not give you that you should have if you did not suffer from indigestion."

Exasperated, he stood right in front of Alexander :

"If I am ill it is this brute's fault. For thirty-five years he has been poisoning me with his filthy cooking."

Mme Maramballe turned her head round quickly to look at the old servant. Their eyes met in a glance which contained their mutual thanks.

ALLOUMA

I

A FRIEND HAD TOLD ME THAT IF, DURING MY TRAVELS IN Algeria, I happened to be near Bordj-Ebbaba, I was to be sure to visit his old friend Auballe, who had settled down there.

These names had passed from my mind, and the settler was far from my thoughts, when by pure chance I came across him.

For a month I had been roaming afoot over that magnificent country which stretches from Algiers to Cherchell, Orleansville and Tiaret. The region is both barren and wooded, both imposing and friendly. Between the mountains dense forests of pines clothe narrow valleys through which the winter torrents rush. Enormous trees fallen across the ravine serve as bridges for the Arabs, and support a mass of creepers which twine around their dead trunks and deck them anew with life. In the secluded folds of the mountains there are dells awe-inspiring in their beauty, and streamlets whose level banks, covered with rose-bay, delight the eye with their inconceivable charm.

But my sweetest memories of the journey are those of my afternoon walks along the shady roads over those undulating hills, from which one overlooks a vast, russet-brown expanse of rolling country, stretching from the bluish sea to the mountain range of the Ouarsenis, crowned by the cedar forests of Teniet-el-Haad.

On the day I was speaking of, I had lost my way. I had climbed up to a crest from which I could see, above a line of hills, the wide plain of the Mitidja, and far in the background, on the summit of another range of mountains, almost invisible in the distance, that strange monument called the Christians'

Tomb, the burying-place, so they say, of a family of Mauritanian kings. I went down the other side, towards the South, while before me, stretching as far as the peaks upreared against the clear sky on the edge of the desert, there appeared a broken country, high and tawny, as if all the hills were covered with lion skins sewn together. Here and there, higher than the rest, rose a yellowish, pointed hummock, like the hairy back of a camel.

I walked rapidly, light-hearted, as one feels when following the intricate windings of a mountain path. Life has no burdens during these vigorous tramps in the keen mountain air; body and soul, thoughts and cares alike, all cease to trouble. That day I was oblivious of all the cares that oppress and torture our lives, oblivious of everything but the joy of that descent. In the distance I discerned Arab encampments, brown, pointed tents, clinging to the ground like shellfish to the rocks, or little cabins, mere huts made of branches, from which a grey smoke issued. White forms, men or women, wandered slowly about, and the bells of the herds sounded thinly in the evening air.

The arbutuses along my path drooped under their curious load, and spattered the road with their purple fruit. They looked like martyred trees from which a bloody sweat dripped, for at the end of each branch hung a red spot like a drop of blood.

The soil around them was covered with this scarlet rain, and the fruit trodden underfoot left gory stains on the ground. Now and again, springing upwards as I went along, I gathered some of the ripest and ate them.

Now all the valleys were filling with a white mist which rose slowly like the steam from a bull's flanks, and above the mountains which rose on the horizon, bordering the Sahara, flamed a sunset like an illuminated missal. Long streaks of gold alternated with streaks of blood-red (more blood; the whole story of man is blood and gold!), while here and there, between the streaks, a narrow opening yielded a glimpse of a greenish-blue sky, infinitely far, like a dream.

Oh ! how far I was, how far from everything and everybody connected with a town-dweller's life, even far from myself, a kind of wandering being, without consciousness or thought, merely seeing things as I went along and liking what I saw ; far also from the road I had planned to follow and which I had forgotten about, for with the approach of night I realised that I was lost.

Darkness fell upon the land like a pall, and I could see nothing in front of me but the mountain looming in the distance. Seeing tents in a valley, I went down to them, and endeavoured to make the first Arab I met understand where I wanted to go. I cannot tell whether he guessed my meaning, but he replied at great length in a tongue of which I understood not a word. In despair, I had made up my mind to spend the night near the camp, wrapped in a rug, when amongst the strange words which came from his mouth, I thought I recognised the name of Bordj-Ebbaba.

" Bordj-Ebbaba ? " I repeated, and he replied : " Yes, yes ! "

I showed him two francs, a fortune to him, and he started off, I following him. Long, long, in the darkness of the night, I followed this pale phantom who hurried bare-footed before me over stony paths on which I continually stumbled.

Suddenly a light appeared. We came to the door of a white house, a kind of small fort, straight-walled and with no windows on the outside. I knocked, and the howling of dogs came from within. A Frenchman's voice inquired : " Who is there ? "

" Does M. Auballe live here ? " I replied.

" Yes."

The door opened, and I was face to face with M. Auballe himself, a tall, fair-haired fellow, down at heel, a pipe in his mouth, looking like a good-natured Hercules.

I introduced myself, and he held out both hands to me, saying : " Make yourself at home, sir."

A quarter of an hour later I was dining exceedingly well opposite my host, who continued to smoke.

I knew his story. After having wasted a considerable fortune on women, he had invested all he had left in an Algerian estate, and had planted a vineyard. The vines were doing well; he was happy, and looked serene and self-satisfied. I could not understand how this gay Parisian had been able to get used to this monotonous, solitary life, and I questioned him about it.

"How long have you been here?" I asked.

"Nine years."

"Don't you get terrible fits of depression?"

"No, one gets reconciled to this country, and then ends by liking it. You would scarcely believe how it grips people by means of a host of trivial animal instincts that we are unconscious of in ourselves. At first we become attached to it by the subtle, inexplicable satisfaction of our senses. The air and the climate conquer our bodies, in spite of ourselves, and the cheerful sunlight which floods the country keeps the mind clear and peaceful, easily. Through our eyes it pours into us continuously, and you might truly say that it purges the darkest recesses of the soul."

"And women?" I asked.

"Ah! one misses them a little."

"Only a little?"

"My God! Yes—a little. For even amongst the tribes, one always finds accommodating natives who wish to copy European ways."

He turned to the Arab who was waiting on me, a tall, dark fellow with black eyes gleaming under his turban, and said:

"Leave us, Mohammed; I will call you when I want you."

Then, turning to me, he explained:

"He understands French, and I am going to tell you a story in which he plays a great part."

On Mohammed's departure he began:

"I had been here about four years, and was still very little at home in this country, whose language I was only just beginning to stammer; I was compelled from time to time to

spend several days in Algiers to avoid breaking right away from the pleasures—the pleasures that have cost me so dear.

“I had bought this farmhouse, a ‘bordj,’ as they call it, an old fortified guard-house, some hundreds of yards from the native encampment whose men I employ in my fields. From this tribe—a branch of the tribe of Ulad Taadja—I had chosen for my personal servant a strapping fellow, Mohammed ben Lam’har, whom you saw just now, and he soon became extremely devoted to me. As he did not like sleeping in a house, being unaccustomed to this, he pitched his tent a few steps from the door, so that I could call him from my window.

“My life, well, you can guess it. All day I supervised the clearing and planting, I shot a little, and dined with the officers of the neighbouring stations, or they came to dine with me.

“As for . . . amusements—you have heard about those. Algiers supplied the best of them; and now and again an accommodating and sympathetic Arab would stop me in the middle of a walk, to suggest that he should bring me home a native woman in the evening. Sometimes I accepted his offer, but more often I refused, thinking of the trouble that might follow.

“One evening in early summer, on returning from a tour of inspection around the fields, I wanted Mohammed, and entered his tent without calling, as I often did.

“On a big, red, woollen Jebel-Amour rug, thick and soft as a mattress, a woman was sleeping, a girl, almost nude, with her arms crossed over her eyes. Her white body, gleaming in the light admitted through the raised flap, seemed to me to be one of the most perfect specimens of the human race I had ever seen. Round here women are very beautiful, tall and uncommonly graceful in form and features.

“Somewhat confused, I dropped the flap of the tent and returned to the house.

“I am very fond of women. That lightning vision had pierced me through and through, kindling again in my blood

the old, formidable ardour which had obliged me to leave France. It was a warm evening in July, and I spent nearly the whole night at the window, my eyes fixed on the dark shadow on the ground which was Mohammed's tent.

"When he came into my room the next day, I looked him full in the face, and he lowered his head like a man who feels ashamed and guilty. Did he guess what I knew?"

"I asked him bluntly: 'So you are married, Mohammed?'"

"I saw him blush, and he stammered:

"'No, sir.'"

"I made him speak French and teach me Arabic, and the result was one of the most incoherent jumbles imaginable.

"'Then why is there a woman under your roof?' I retorted.

"'She is from the South,' he murmured.

"'Ah! she is from the South. That does not tell me how she comes to be in your tent.'"

"Without answering my question, he continued:

"'She is very pretty.'"

"'Yes, indeed! Well, the next time you have a very pretty woman from the South to stay with you, please show her into my cabin and not into yours. Do you understand, Mohammed?'"

"He replied very earnestly: 'Yes, sir.'"

"I must confess that during the whole day my feelings were dominated by the memory of that Arab girl lying on the red rug, and on my way back to dinner, I wanted to go into Mohammed's tent again. In the evening he waited on me as usual, coming and going with impassive face, and I was often on the point of asking whether he was going to keep this very pretty Southern maiden for long under his camel-skin roof.

"About nine o'clock, still haunted by the lure of the female, which is as tenacious as the hunting instinct in dogs, I went out for a breath of air, taking a short walk in the direction of the brown canvas tent, through which I could see the bright flame of a lamp. Then I wandered further away, lest Mohammed should find me near his quarters.

"On returning an hour later, I saw clearly his characteristic profile in silhouette on the tent. Then, taking my key from my pocket, I made my way into the bordj where there slept, besides myself, my steward, two French labourers and an old cook brought from Algiers.

"I went upstairs and was surprised to notice a streak of light under my door. I opened it, and saw facing me, seated on a wicker-chair beside the table on which a candle was burning, a girl with the face of a statue, quietly waiting for me, and wearing all the silver trinkets which the women of the South wear on legs and arms, on the throat and even on the stomach. Her eyes, dilated by the use of kohl, gazed at me; her forehead, her cheeks and her chin were studded with four little blue marks delicately tattooed on the skin. Her arms, loaded with bangles, rested on her thighs, which were covered by a kind of red silk jibbah which hung from her shoulders.

"Seeing me come in, she stood upright before me, covered with her barbarous jewellery, in an attitude of proud submission.

" 'What are you doing here?' I said to her in Arabic.

" 'I am here because I was told to come.'

" 'Who told you to come?'

" 'Mohammed.'

" 'All right. Sit down.'

"She sat down and lowered her eyes, while I stood looking at her.

"She had an unusual face: regular, refined features with a slightly animal expression, but mystical like that of a Buddha. Her thick lips, coloured with a kind of reddish bloom which was also apparent elsewhere on her skin, pointed to a slight mixture of Negro blood, although her hands and arms were irreproachably white.

"Perplexed, tempted and embarrassed, I felt doubtful as to what I ought to do. In order to gain time, and to give myself an opportunity to consider the problem, I asked further questions about her origin; her arrival in this country and her

connection with Mohammed. But she only answered those which least interested me, and I found it impossible to ascertain why or when she had come, with what object, on whose orders, or what had taken place between her and my servant.

"Just as I was going to tell her to return to Mohammed's tent, she apparently anticipated my words, suddenly drew herself up, and raising her bare arms, while the tinkling bracelets slid in a mass towards her shoulders, she clasped her hands behind my neck and drew me towards her with an air of entreaty and irresistible wilfulness.

"Her eyes, burning with the desire to bewitch, with that need of conquest that imparts a feline fascination to a woman's immodest gaze, appealed to me, captivated me, robbed me of all power of resistance, and roused me to an impetuous passion. It was a short, silent and violent struggle carried on through the medium of the eyes alone, the eternal struggle between the primitive man and woman, in which man is always conquered.

"Her hands behind my head drew me, with slow, increasing, irresistible pressure, towards her smiling red lips, to which I suddenly pressed mine, holding her close to me, while the silver bangles, from her throat to her feet, jingled under the pressure.

"She was as wiry, supple and healthy as an animal, with the tricks and movements, the grace and even the scent of a gazelle, which gave her kisses a rare, indescribable flavour, as foreign to my senses as a taste of some tropical fruit.

"After a while . . . I say after a while, it was perhaps as dawn was breaking, I decided to send her away, thinking that she would go just as she had come. I had not yet considered what I should do with her, or what she would do with me. But as soon as she understood my intention, she murmured :

"'If you send me away, where would you have me go? I will have to sleep out of doors, in the dark. Let me sleep on the carpet at the foot of your bed.'

"What could I say? What could I do? I reflected that

Mohammed, in his turn, was doubtless watching the lighted window of my room, and all kinds of problems, which had not occurred to me in the embarrassment of the first few moments, now confronted me.

" 'Stay here,' I said ; ' We must talk it over.' "

" My decision was made almost immediately. Since this girl had been thrown into my arms, I would keep her as a kind of slave mistress, hidden in my house, like the women of the harems. When she no longer pleased me, it would always be easy to get rid of her somehow, for in Africa these creatures belong to us almost body and soul.

" ' I will be kind to you,' I said, ' I will treat you well, but I want to know who you are, and where you come from.' "

" She understood that she had to tell me something, and related her story to me, or rather a story, for she was probably lying from beginning to end, as Arabs invariably do, with or without a motive.

" The habit of lying is one of the most surprising and incomprehensible features of the native character. These people who are so steeped in Islamism that it forms a part of them, governs their instincts, modifies their racial characteristics and differentiates them from others in mental outlook as much as the colour of the skin differentiates the Negro from the white man, are liars to the backbone, to such an extent that one can never believe what they say. Do they owe it to their religion ? I cannot say. One must have lived among them to understand to what a degree falsehood forms a part of their whole existence and becomes a kind of second nature, a necessity of life.

" She told me, then, that she was a daughter of a Caid of Ouled Sidi Cheik and of a woman captured by him in a raid on the Touaregs. This woman must have been a black slave, or at least the offspring of an earlier mixture of Arab and Negro blood. It is well known that Negresses are highly prized in harems, where they play the part of aphrodisiacs.

" Nothing of this origin was evident except in the purplish

colour of her lips and the dark flush on her long supple breasts. The rest belonged to the beautiful Southern race, white and slender, her features as simple and regular as the head of an Indian image, a likeness which was enhanced by her wide-set eyes.

"Of her real life I could get no exact information. She described it to me in disconnected trifles which seemed to pour haphazard from a confused memory, mingled with delightfully childish remarks, a whole picture of nomad life born of the brain of a squirrel which leaped from tent to tent, from camp to camp and from tribe to tribe.

"All this was narrated with the serious air which this strange race always preserves, with the expression of an idol descending to gossip, and with a rather comical gravity.

"When she had finished, I realised that I had absorbed nothing of her long story, full of trifling incidents stored up in her nimble brain, and I wondered whether she had not been merely playing with me in this meaningless and serious gossip, which left me no wiser than before about her or any event in her life.

"I reflected on this conquered race in the midst of whom we settle, or rather, who settle in the midst of us, whose language we are beginning to speak, whose everyday life we see going on under the flimsy canvas of their tents, on whom we impose our laws, our regulations and our customs, and of whom we know nothing, nothing at all, as though we were not there, as though we had not been watching little else for nearly sixty years. We no more know what happens under that hut of branches or under that little cone of cloth anchored to the ground with stakes, than we know what the so-called civilised Arabs in the Moorish houses in Algiers do or think. Behind the whitewashed walls of their city dwellings, behind the leafy screens of their huts or behind the brown curtain of camel skin flapping in the wind, they live on our thresholds unknown, mysterious, sly and untrustworthy, smiling and

impenetrable in their submission. Believe me, when I look at the neighbouring encampment from a distance through my field-glasses, I find that they have superstitions, ceremonies, and innumerable customs still unknown and not even suspected by us! Never, perhaps, has a race conquered by force been able to escape so completely from any effective domination, moral influence or persistent but useless inquiry on the part of their conquerors.

"I suddenly felt, as never before, that secret and impassable barrier which Nature has mysteriously erected between the races, raised between me and that Arab girl who had given herself, offered herself to me, become mine.

"Thinking of it for the first time, I asked her :

" 'What is your name ?' "

"She had been silent for some minutes, and I saw her start involuntarily as if she had forgotten that I was there. Then I saw in her eyes, lifted to mine, that the short interval had been sufficient for sleep to claim her, a sudden, irresistible slumber, almost overwhelming, like everything that seizes the changing fancies of women.

"She replied dully, stifling a yawn : ' Allouma.' "

" 'You want to go to sleep ?' I continued.

" 'Yes,' she replied.

" 'Very well, then, sleep,' I said.

"She quietly stretched herself by my side, lying face down, her forehead resting on her crossed arms, and I felt almost at once that her primitive, fugitive thoughts had vanished in sleep.

"As for me, lying near her, I began to wonder why Mohammed had given her to me. Had he played the part of the generous and self-sacrificing servant who gives up the woman he had taken for himself, or had he acted on an idea more complex and practical in thus giving up to me this girl who had taken my fancy? An Arab, where women are concerned, has the most rigorous standards, coupled with the most inexplicable

tolerance, and one can understand his stern yet easy-going morality no better than his other feelings. Perhaps in my chance entry into his tent I had forestalled the kindly intentions of this thoughtful servant who had intended for me this woman, his friend, perhaps even his mistress.

"Tormented by all these possibilities, I became so tired that, in my turn, I gradually fell into a deep slumber.

"The creaking of my door aroused me; Mohammed was coming in to wake me as he did every morning. He opened the window, through which a flood of daylight poured, lighting up the figure of Allouma still asleep on the bed; then he gathered up my trousers, waistcoat and jacket from the floor in order to brush them. He did not look at the woman lying by my side, he did not even appear to notice that she was there, and his gravity, his demeanour and his expression were the same as usual. But the light and movement, the slight patter of the man's bare feet, and the feeling of the fresh air on her skin and in her lungs roused Allouma from her torpor. She stretched her arms, turned over and opened her eyes, looked at me and at Mohammed with the same indifference, and sat up. Then she murmured:

" 'I am hungry now.'

" 'What will you have to eat?' I inquired.

" 'Kahoua.'¹

" 'Coffee with bread and butter?'

" 'Yes.'

"Mohammed, standing near our bed, my clothes over his arm, waited for orders.

" 'Bring something to eat for Allouma and myself,' I told him, and he went out without the least trace of astonishment or annoyance on his face.

"When he had gone, I asked the girl:

" 'Do you wish to live in my house?'

" 'Yes.'

¹ An Arab dish.

" 'I will give you a room for yourself, and a woman to wait on you.'

" 'You are generous, and I am grateful for it.'

" 'But if you do not behave yourself, I will send you away from here.'

" 'I will do anything you want of me.'

" She took my hand and kissed it, in token of submission.

" Mohammed returned, bringing a tray with breakfast.

" 'Allouma is going to live in the house,' I told him. 'Spread some rugs in the room at the end of the passage, and send for the wife of Abd-el-Kader-el-Hadara to come and wait on her.'

" 'Yes, sir.'

" That was all he said.

" An hour later, my beautiful Arab girl was installed in a large, well-lighted room; and when I came to see that everything was right, she entreated me to give her a wardrobe with a mirror on the door. I promised and left her squatting on a Jebel-Amour rug, a cigarette in her mouth, gossiping with the old Arab woman whom I had engaged, as if they had known each other all their lives.

II

" For a month I was very happy with her, and in a queer fashion I became attached to this creature of another race, who seemed to me to be almost of another species, born on a neighbouring planet.

" I did not love her; no, one does not love the young women of this primitive continent. Between them and ourselves, even between them and their own menfolk the Arabs, love as we understand it does not exist. They are too primitive, their feelings are insufficiently refined to arouse in our souls that sentimental exaltation which is the poetry of love. There is no mental or moral intoxication blended with the physical

intoxication which these charming and worthless creatures stimulate in us.

"Yet they grip us and take possession of us just as other women do, but in a different way, less tenacious, less painful and sorrowful.

"I cannot yet describe with any accuracy what I felt towards her. I told you a little while ago that Africa, this bare, artless country, devoid of all intellectual attraction, gradually overcomes us by an indefinable and unfailing charm, by the breath of its atmosphere, by the constant mildness of the early mornings and the evenings, by its delightful sunlight and by the feeling of well-being that it instils in us. Well, Allouma attracted me in the same way by numberless hidden and fascinating enticements, by the keen allurements, not of her caresses, for she was typically Oriental in her nonchalance, but of her charming unconstraint.

"I left her absolutely free to come and go as she pleased, and she passed at least one afternoon out of every two in the neighbouring camp, amongst my native labourers' womenfolk. Often, too, she would spend a whole day admiring herself in the glazed mahogany wardrobe that I had obtained from Miliana. She admired herself in all conscience, standing before the great glass door, in which she followed her movements with deep and serious attention. She would walk with her head thrown back in order to pass judgment on her hips and her back, turn, move away and come back again, until, tired of moving about, she would sit on a hassock and contemplate her reflection face to face, her mind absorbed in this occupation.

"After a little while, I noticed that she went out nearly every day after breakfast, and disappeared completely until the evening.

"Feeling somewhat anxious, I asked Mohammed whether he knew what she might be doing during this lengthy absence.

" 'Don't let it trouble you,' he replied, unconcernedly, 'the Feast of Ramadan will soon be here. She has to carry out her devotions.'

"He also seemed delighted with the presence of Allouma in the house, but not once did I detect the least sign of anything suspicious between them, nor did they seem to be in collusion, or to hide anything from me.

"So I accepted the situation, without understanding it, leaving the solution to the workings of time and chance.

"Often, after inspecting my fields, the vines and the clearings, I would go for a long walk. You know the magnificent forests of this part of Algeria, those almost impenetrable ravines where the fallen pine-trees dam the torrents, and those little dells full of rose-bay which from the mountain tops look like Oriental carpets spread out along the watercourses. You know that frequently in these woods and on these slopes, where never a soul seems to have penetrated, you may suddenly come across the snow-white dome of a koubla containing the bones of a lonely, humble marabout, visited at infrequent intervals by a few determined followers, who come from the neighbouring village with candles in their pockets to light them on the tomb of the holy man.

"One evening, as I was returning, I passed close to one of these Mohammedan chapels, and glancing through the ever open door, I saw that a woman was praying before the shrine. It made a charming picture, this Arab girl bowed on the floor in the ruinous building, where the wind entered at will and piled up into yellowish heaps in the corners the withered, delicate pine-needles. I drew near to see better, and recognised Allouma. Absorbed in her devotions, she neither saw nor heard me, and continued to address the saint in a low voice, thinking herself alone with him, and pouring out to God's servant all her troubles. Sometimes she stopped awhile to meditate, to remember what she had still to say, to make sure of forgetting none of her store of confidences; at other times she grew excited as if he had answered her, or as if he had advised her to do something against her will, against which she was arguing.

"I stole away noiselessly, as I had come, and returned to dinner.

"In the evening I sent for her, and as she came in I saw on her face a thoughtful look that was not usually there.

" 'Sit down there,' I said to her, indicating a seat on the couch by my side.

"She sat down, and as I leaned towards her to kiss her, she drew her head back quickly.

"I was astonished and asked her what was the matter.

" 'It is Ramadan,' she said.

"I began to laugh.

" 'And the marabout has forbidden you to allow yourself to be kissed during Ramadan ?'

" 'Oh, yes ! I am an Arab, and you are an infidel.'

" 'That would be a great sin ?'

" 'Oh, yes !'

" 'Then you have eaten nothing all day, until sunset ?'

" 'No, nothing.'

" 'But after sunset you had something to eat ?'

" 'Yes.'

" 'Well, then, as it is quite dark now, you need not be stricter about the rest than you are about food ?'

"She looked ruffled and hurt, and retorted with a haughtiness that I had not known in her before :

" 'If an Arab girl let herself be touched by an infidel during Ramadan, she would be accursed for ever.'

" 'And this will last the whole month ?'

"She replied resolutely :

" 'Yes, the whole month of Ramadan.'

"I put on a stern air, and said to her :

" 'Very well, you may go and spend Ramadan with your family.'

"She seized my hands and clasped them to her, crying :

" 'Oh ! I beg of you, don't be cruel ; you shall see how good I will be. Let us keep Ramadan together, if you will.'

I will look after you, I will do anything you fancy, but don't be cruel.'

"I could not help smiling at her quaint air of grief, and sent her away to bed.

"An hour later, as I was going to bed, there were two light taps on my door, so light that I scarcely heard them.

" 'Come in,' I cried, and Allouma entered, carrying a large tray loaded with Arab delicacies, sweet fried croquettes, and a strange collection of native pastry.

"She laughed, showing her fine teeth, and repeated :

" 'We are going to keep Ramadan together.'

"You know that the fasting which begins at dawn and ends at dusk, at the moment when the eye can no longer distinguish between a white and a black thread, is followed every evening by private little feasts in which eating goes on until dawn. It follows that for a native not overburdened by his conscience, Ramadan merely consists in transposing day and night. Allouma, however, was more conscientious about it. She placed her tray between us on the couch, and taking in her long slender fingers a little powdered ball, she put it in my mouth, murmuring :

" 'Eat this, it is good.'

"I munched the light cake, which was indeed excellent, and asked her :

" 'Did you make that ?'

" 'Yes, I did.'

" 'For me ?'

" 'Yes, for you.'

" 'To enable me to tolerate Ramadan ?'

" 'Yes, don't be unkind ! I will bring you some every day.'

"What a terrible month I spent there ! a sugary, insipid, maddening month, full of little indulgences, temptations, fits of anger and vain struggles against an invincible resistance.

"Then, when the three days of Beiram arrived, I celebrated them in my own way, and Ramadan was forgotten.

"A very hot summer passed, and towards the early days of autumn, Allouma seemed to be preoccupied and abstracted and took no interest in anything.

"One evening, when I sent for her, she was not in her room, and thinking that she was somewhere about the house, I sent someone to look for her. She had not come back, so I opened the window and called for Mohammed.

"His answer came from within the tent :

" ' Yes, sir ? ' "

" ' Do you know where Allouma is ? ' "

" ' No, sir. She is not lost, is she ? ' "

"A few seconds later, he entered my room, so agitated that he could not suppress his anxiety.

" ' Allouma lost ? ' he asked.

" ' Yes, she has disappeared. ' "

" ' Surely not. ' "

" ' Go and look for her, ' I told him.

"He remained standing there, lost in thought and trying to grasp the situation. Then he entered Allouma's room, where her clothes were scattered in truly Oriental disorder. He examined everything like a policeman, or rather he snuffed around like a dog, and then, incapable of further effort, he murmured with an air of resignation :

" ' Gone ! she is gone ! ' "

"For my part, I feared some accident, a fall down a ravine, a sprain, and I sent out all the men in the camp with orders to search until they had found her.

"They searched for her all night, the whole of the next day and for a week, but could discover no clue that would put us on the right track. I suffered, I missed her ; the house seemed empty and life seemed a desert. Then disturbing thoughts began to pass through my mind : I thought that she might have been kidnapped, or even killed. But every time I attempted to question Mohammed or to tell him my fears, he replied steadfastly :

" ' No, she has gone away. ' "

"Then he added the Arab word 'r'ezale,' meaning a gazelle, as if to say that she ran quickly and was far away.

"Three weeks passed, and I had given up hope of ever seeing my Arab mistress again, when one morning Mohammed, his face beaming with joy, came into my room and said :

" ' Allouma has returned, sir ! ' "

"I jumped out of bed and asked him where she was.

" ' She dares not come in ! Look, under the tree over there ! ' "

"And with outstretched arm he pointed through the window to a whitish shadow at the foot of an olive-tree.

"I got up and went out. As I approached that bundle of cloth which seemed to have been thrown against the twisted trunk, I recognised the large dark eyes and the tattooed stars on the long, regular face of the wild girl who had bewitched me. As I advanced, I was seized by a fit of anger, a longing to strike her, to make her suffer in revenge.

"I called to her from a distance :

" ' Where have you been ? ' "

"She did not reply, and remained motionless, as if she scarcely lived, resigned to the expected blows.

"I was now standing right above her, gazing with astonishment at the rags she wore, tatters of silk and wool, grey with dust, and torn and filthy.

"With my hand raised as if to a dog, I repeated :

" ' Where have you been ? ' "

" ' From over there,' she murmured.

" ' From where ? ' "

" ' From the tribe.' "

" ' From what tribe ? ' "

" ' From my own.' "

" ' Why did you go away ? ' "

"Seeing that I was not going to strike her, she plucked up a little courage, and said in a low voice :

" ' I wanted . . . I wanted . . . I could not live in the house any longer.' "

"I saw tears in her eyes, and immediately I felt a foolish sort of pity. I stooped towards her, and on turning round to sit down I perceived Mohammed watching in the distance.

"Very gently I continued :

" 'Come, will you tell me why you went away ?' "

"Then she told me that she had long felt in her heart the nomad's irresistible desire to get back to a tent, to sleep, run and roll on the sand, to wander from plain to plain with the herds, to feel nothing over her head, between the yellow stars of heaven and the blue stars on her face, except the thin curtain of worn and patched cloth through which one can see, awakening in the night, the gleam of countless spots of light.

"She pictured this to me so simply, so forcibly and so reasonably that I was convinced of the truth of it, and feeling sorry for her, I asked :

" 'Why didn't you tell me that you wanted to go away for a while ?' "

" 'Because you would not have liked. . . .' "

" 'If you had promised to come back, I would have given you permission.' "

" 'You would not have believed me.' "

"Seeing that I was not angry, she laughed, and added :

" 'You see, it is all over. I have come back and here I am. I had to spend a few days over there. Now I have had enough : it is all over and done with. I have come back and I am no longer unhappy. I am very pleased. You are not cruel to me.' "

" 'Come to the house,' I said to her.

"She stood up, and I took her hand, held her slender fingers ; and triumphant in her rags, with a jingling of bracelets, necklaces and ornaments, she walked solemnly towards my house, where Mohammed was waiting for us.

"Before going in, I repeated :

" 'Allouma, if at any time you want to go home, tell me so and I will let you go.' "

" 'You promise ?' she asked cautiously.

" 'Yes, I promise.'

" 'I promise also. When I feel home-sick,' and she placed her hands on her forehead with a magnificent gesture, 'I will tell you that I must go yonder, and you will let me go.'

"I accompanied her to her room, followed by Mohammed bringing water, for we had not yet been able to warn the wife of Abd-el-Kader-el-Hadara of the return of her mistress.

"She entered, perceived the mirror, and with joy in her face ran towards it as if to welcome a long-lost mother. She looked at herself for a few seconds, then pouted and said to the mirror, with a shade of annoyance :

" 'Wait a minute, I have silk dresses in the wardrobe. I will be beautiful very soon.'

"I left her to flirt with her reflection in the glass.

"Our life together went on as before, and I fell more and more under the strange spell, the physical allurements of this girl, for whom at the same time I felt a kind of paternal superiority.

"All went well for six months, and then I felt that she was again becoming nervous, restless and rather sad. One day I said to her :

" 'Do you want to go home ?'

" 'Yes, I should like to.'

" 'You did not dare to tell me ?'

" 'No, I did not dare.'

" 'Very well, then : you may go.'

"She seized my hands and kissed them as she did in all her outbursts of gratitude, and the next day she had disappeared.

"As before, she returned after about three weeks, again in tatters, black with dust and sunburn, and satiated with the nomad's life, with sand and with freedom. During two years she went home in that way four times.

"I used to take her back cheerfully and without jealousy, for I felt that jealousy could not exist without love as we understand love in our own country. Certainly, I might very

well have killed her if I had caught her deceiving me, but it would have been rather as I would have thrashed a disobedient dog, from pure anger. I should not have felt that torture, that consuming fire, that terrible suffering that constitute jealousy in the North. I said just now that I might have killed her as I would have thrashed a disobedient dog. I loved her, indeed, rather as one might love a very rare animal, a dog or a horse that one could not replace. She was a wonderful, a delightful animal, in the form of a woman : nothing more.

"I can hardly describe what a gulf separated our souls, although no doubt our hearts came into contact at times and responded to the touch. She was a pleasant object in my house and in my life, one to which I had become accustomed and which appealed only to my physical senses.

"One morning Mohammed came into my room with a strange expression on his face, the anxious look an Arab's eyes have, like a cat faced by a dog and preparing to flee.

"Seeing his face, I asked :

" 'Hullo ! what is the matter ? ' "

" 'Allouma has gone away.' "

"I began to laugh.

" 'Gone ? where to ? ' "

" 'Gone right away, sir.' "

" 'What, gone right away ? ' "

" 'Yes, sir.' "

" 'You must be mad, my lad ! ' "

" 'No, sir.' "

" 'Why has she gone away ? How ? Come, explain yourself ! ' "

"He stood still, unwilling to speak ; and then, all of a sudden, he gave vent to one of those typical outbursts of rage which we see occasionally in the street flare out between two fanatical Arabs, in which Oriental silence and gravity give place to the wildest gestures and the most ferocious threats.

"In the midst of his ravings I gathered that Allouma had fled with my shepherd.

"I had to calm Mohammed and drag from him, one by one, the full details.

"It was a long story. I understood at last that for a week he had been keeping watch on Allouma, who had been meeting, behind the nearby clumps of cactus or in the ravine where the rose-bay grew, a tramp who had been engaged as a shepherd by my superintendent at the end of the month before.

"Mohammed had seen her go out the night before, and he had not seen her come back, and he repeated, with an incensed air :

" 'Gone, sir : she has gone for good.'

"I cannot tell why, but his conviction that she had eloped with this vagabond instantly came home to me also, absolutely and irresistibly. It seemed absurd and improbable, yet all the more certain when one considered the irrational logic typical of women.

"With aching heart, and fuming with rage, I strove to recall this man's features, and I suddenly recollected seeing him, a week or two before, standing on a hillock in the midst of his flock and looking at me. He was a big Bedouin whose bare limbs matched the colour of his rags, a typical savage brute with prominent cheek-bones, a crooked nose, a receding chin and thin legs, like a tall skeleton clothed in tatters, with the treacherous eyes of a jackal.

"I was quite certain that she had fled with this scoundrel. Why ? Because she was Allouma, a child of the desert. Another girl in Paris, a street-walker, would have run away with my coachman or with a hooligan of the slums.

" 'All right,' I said to Mohammed. 'If she has gone, so much the worse for her. Leave me alone ; I have some letters to write.'

"He went away, surprised at my calm. I got up and opened the window, and began to draw in deep breaths of the stifling

air which the sirocco was bringing from the South. Then I thought to myself :

“ ‘ My God, she is a . . . woman, like many others. Can anyone tell why they do these things, what makes them love and follow a man, or leave him ? ’ ”

“ Yes, occasionally we know : generally we do not. At times, we are doubtful.

“ Why had she disappeared with that repulsive brute ? Why, indeed ? It may have been because for practically a whole month the wind had been blowing from the South.

“ A breath of wind ! That was reason enough ! Did she know, do any of them, even the most introspective of them, know in most cases why they do certain things ? No more than a weathercock swinging in the wind. The slightest breeze sways the light vane of copper, iron or wood, in the same way that some imperceptible influence, some fleeting impression, stirs and guides the fickle fancy of a woman, whether she be from town or country, from a suburb or from the desert.

“ They may realise, afterwards, if they consider it and understand, why they have done one thing rather than another ; but, at the same time, they have no idea, for they are the play-things of their susceptibilities, the feather-brained slaves of events and environment, of chance and caprice, and of all their lightest whims.”

M. Auballe had risen to his feet. He took a few steps, looked at me and laughingly said :

“ There you have a desert love-affair ! ”

“ What if she comes back ? ” I inquired.

“ The wicked girl ! ” he murmured. “ Yet I should be very glad all the same.”

“ And you would forgive the shepherd ? ”

“ Well, yes. Where women are concerned, one must always forgive . . . or ignore.”

Daily

HAUTOT AND HIS SON

I

IN FRONT OF THE BUILDING, HALF FARMHOUSE, HALF MANOR-house—one of those semi-feudal country dwellings of mixed character now occupied by wealthy farmers—the dogs chained to the apple-trees in the courtyard were barking and howling at the sight of the bags carried by the gamekeepers and the boys. In the large dining-room-kitchen, Hautot and his son, M. Bermont the tax-collector, and M. Mondarn the notary, were having a bite and a mouthful of wine before they went out shooting, for it was the first day of the season.

The elder Hautot, proud of his possessions, was boasting of the game that his guests would find in his shoot. He was a big Norman, one of those powerful, ruddy, big-boned men who can lift a cart-load of apples on to their shoulders. Half peasant, half gentleman, rich, respected, influential, autocratic, he had first insisted that his son César should work up to the third form so that he might be well informed, and then he had stopped his education for fear he should become a fine gentleman and take no interest in the farm.

Nearly as tall as his father, but thinner, César Hautot was a good son, docile, contented, full of admiration, respect and regard for the wishes and opinions of the elder Hautot.

M. Bermont, the tax-collector, a short, stout man whose red cheeks showed a thin network of violet veins like the tributaries and winding streams of a river on a map, asked :

“And hares—are there any hares?”

The elder Hautot replied :

"As many as you please, especially in the hollows of Puysatier."

"Where shall we begin?" asked the notary, a good-natured, stout, pale man, whose flesh bulged out in his tight-fitting, brand-new shooting-kit recently bought at Rouen.

"In that direction, through the bottoms. We will drive the partridges into the open and fall upon them."

Hautot got up. The others followed his example, took their guns from the corner, examined the locks, stamped their feet to ease them in their boots, not yet softened by the warmth within. Then they went out, and the dogs straining at the leash barked and beat the air with their paws.

They set out towards the hollows. This was a little glen, or rather, a long, undulating stretch of poor land unfit for cultivation, furrowed with ditches and covered with ferns—an excellent preserve for game.

The sportsmen took their places, Hautot senior to the right, Hautot junior to the left, with the two guests in the centre. The keepers and game-bag carriers followed. The solemn moment had come when sportsmen await the first shot, their hearts beating more rapidly, and their nervous fingers unable to leave the trigger alone.

Suddenly there was a shot. Hautot senior had fired. They all stopped and saw a partridge fall out of a swift-flying covey and drop into a ditch covered with thick shrubs. The excited sportsman began to run, taking big strides, dragging aside the briars in his path, and disappeared into the thicket to look for the bird.

Almost immediately a second shot was heard.

"Ha! Ha! the rascal," exclaimed M. Bermont, "he must have started a hare from the undergrowth."

They all waited with eyes fixed on the mass of dense under-wood. The notary, making a trumpet of his hands, shouted: "Have you got them?"

As there was no reply from the elder Hautot, César, turning

towards the gamekeeper, said : " Go and help him, Joseph. We must keep in line. We'll wait."

And Joseph, an old, dry stick of a man with swollen, knotty joints, set off at an easy pace down to the ditch, searching for a suitable opening with the caution of a fox. Then, suddenly, he shouted : " Oh, hurry up ! Hurry up ! There has been an accident ! "

They all hurried along and plunged through the briers. Hautot had fallen on his side in a faint with both hands pressed on his abdomen, from which long trickles of blood flowed on to the grass through his linen jacket, which was torn by the shot. In letting go of his gun to pick up the dead partridge that lay within reach, he had dropped it, and the second discharge, going off in the fall, had torn open his bowels. They drew him out of the ditch, undressed him, and saw a frightful wound through which the intestines protruded. Then, after binding him up as well as they could, they carried him home and waited for the doctor, who had been sent for, as well as the priest.

When the doctor arrived, he shook his head gravely, and turning towards young Hautot, who was sobbing on a chair, he said : " My poor boy, this looks bad."

But when the wound was dressed, the patient moved his fingers, first opened his mouth, then his eyes, cast around him a troubled, haggard glance, then appeared to be trying to recall, to understand, and he murmured :

" Good God, I am done for."

The doctor held his hand.

" No, no ; just a few days' rest, it will be all right."

Hautot resumed :

" I am done for ! I am torn to bits ! I know ! "

Then, suddenly :

" I want to talk to my son, if there is time."

In spite of himself, César was weeping, and repeated like a little boy :

"Papa, papa, poor papa!"

But the father said in a more determined tone:

"Come, stop crying, this is no time for tears. I have something to say to you. Sit down there, close to me, it will soon be over, and I shall be easier in my mind. You others, please leave us alone for a minute."

As soon as they were alone:

"Listen, my boy. You are twenty-four, one can talk to you. After all there is not such a mystery about these matters as we attach to them. You know that your mother has been dead seven years and that I am only forty-five, seeing that I married when I was nineteen. Is that not true?"

The son stammered:

"Yes, quite true."

"So then your mother has been dead for seven years, and I am still a widower. Well! a man like me cannot remain a widower at thirty-seven, can he?"

The son replied:

"True enough."

Gasping for breath, very pale and his face drawn with pain, the father continued:

"God! how I suffer! Well, you understand. Man is not made to live alone, but I did not want to give your mother a successor, since I had promised I would not do so. Well . . . you understand?"

"Yes, father."

"Well, I kept a girl at Rouen, 18 Rue de l'Eperlan, the second door on the third floor—I am telling you all this, don't forget—this young girl has been as nice as nice to me, loving, devoted, a real wife. You understand, my lad?"

"Yes, father."

"Well, if I am taken, I owe her something, something substantial that will place her out of the reach of want. You understand?"

"Yes, father."

"I tell you she is good, really good, and but for you and the memory of your mother and also because we three lived here together in this house, I would have brought her here, and then married her, sure enough . . . listen . . . listen . . . my lad, I might have made a will . . . I have not done so! I did not want to . . . you must never write things down . . . not things of that sort . . . it is bad for the rightful heirs . . . then it muddles up everything . . . it ruins every one. . . . Look you, never go in for legal documents, never have anything to do with them. If I am rich it is because I have avoided them all my life. You understand, my boy!"

"Yes, father."

"Now listen. . . . Listen close. . . . So I have made no will. . . . I did not want to. . . . Besides, I know you, you are kind-hearted, you are not greedy, not stingy. I said to myself that when my end came, I would tell you all about it and would beg you not to forget the girl: Caroline Donet, 18 Rue de l'Eperlan, third floor, second door on the right, don't forget. And go there directly I am gone—and see she does have no reason to complain. You have plenty. . . . You can spare it—I am leaving you well provided for. Listen! You won't find her at home on week-days. She works at Madame Moreau's in the Rue Beauvoisine. Go on a Thursday. She always expects me on Thursdays. It has been my day for six years. Poor thing, how she will cry! I tell you all this, my boy, because I know you so well. You cannot tell these things to everybody, either to the notary or to the priest. These things happen, every one knows that, but no one talks about them except when one has to. Then there are no outsiders in the secret, nobody except the family, because a family's the same as oneself. You understand?"

"Yes, father."

"You promise?"

"Yes, father."

"You swear?"

"Yes, father."

"I beg, I pray, do not forget, my boy. It means so much to me."

"No, father."

"Go yourself. I want you to make sure of everything."

"Yes, father."

"And then, you will see . . . you will see what she says. I can't tell you more about it. You swear?"

"Yes, father."

"That's right, my boy. Embrace me. Good-bye, I am done for, I know it. Tell the others they may come in."

The son embraced his father, sobbing as he did so; then, obedient as usual, he opened the door and the priest appeared in a white surplice carrying the holy oils.

But the dying man had closed his eyes and refused to open them again, he would make no answer, he even refused to make any sign to show that he understood.

The man had talked enough, he could not continue. Besides, he now felt quiet in his mind and wanted to die in peace. He felt no need to confess to the priest when he had just made his confession to his son who at all events belonged to the family.

Surrounded by his friends and servants on their bended knees, he received the last rites, was purified, and was given absolution, no change of expression on his face showing that he still lived.

He died towards midnight after four hours of convulsive movements which indicated terrible suffering.

II

He was buried on Tuesday, the shooting season having opened on Sunday. On returning home from the cemetery César Hautot spent the rest of the day weeping. He scarcely slept that night and felt so sad when he awoke that he wondered how he could manage to go on living.

However, until evening he kept on thinking that in accordance with his father's dying wish he must go to Rouen the following day, and see this girl, Caroline Donet, who lived at 18 Rue de l'Eperlan, the second door on the third story. He went on repeating the name and address under his breath—as a prayer is repeated—so as not to forget, and he ended by muttering them unceasingly, unable to stop or to think about anything, to such a point had his mind become obsessed by the set phrase.

Accordingly, about eight o'clock next day he ordered Grain-d'orge to be harnessed to the tilbury, and set out at the long, swinging pace of the heavy Norman horse along the high road from Ainville to Rouen. He was wearing a black frock-coat, a silk hat, and trousers strapped under his shoes. Owing to the circumstances he had not put on his flowing blue blouse, so easily taken off at the journey's end, over his black clothes to protect them from dust and dirt.

He got to Rouen as it was striking ten, put up as usual at the Hôtel des Bons Enfants, in the Rue des Trois-Mariés, submitted to being embraced by the landlord, his wife and their five sons, for they had heard the sad news; then he had to tell them all about the accident, which made him shed tears, repel their offers of service, thrust upon him on account of his wealth, and even refuse luncheon, which hurt their feelings.

Having wiped the dust off his hat, brushed his coat and cleaned his boots, he started off to seek the Rue de l'Eperlan, not daring to ask for fear of being recognised and of arousing suspicion.

At last, unable to find the place, he caught sight of a priest, and trusting to the professional discretion of the priesthood, he asked for help.

It was only about one hundred steps farther on—the second street to the right.

Then he hesitated. Up to the present he had felt agitated, confused, humiliated at the idea of finding himself, the son, in the presence of the woman who had been his father's mistress.

All the morality developed by centuries of family training, all that he had been taught since early childhood about women of loose character, the instinctive distrust that all men feel of these women even when they marry them, all his narrow-minded peasant virtue ; all combined to disturb him, to make him hesitate, and fill him with shame.

But he said to himself : " I promised my father. I must not fail." So he pushed the partly-opened door of Number 18, discovered a dark staircase, went up three flights, saw first one door, then a second, then found a bell rope, which he pulled.

The tinkle that sounded in the next room sent a shiver through his body. The door opened and he found himself face to face with a well-dressed young lady, a brunette with rosy cheeks, who gazed at him with eyes full of astonishment.

He did not know what to say, and she, who suspected nothing and was expecting the father, did not invite him in. They looked at each other about thirty seconds until, at last, she said :

" What do you want, sir ? "

He muttered :

" I am the young Hautot."

She started, turned pale, and stammered as if she had known him for a long time :

" Monsieur César ? "

" Yes."

" Well ? "

" I have a message for you from my father."

She exclaimed : " My God ! " and moved away so that he might enter. He closed the door and followed her.

Then he caught sight of a little boy of four or five years playing with a cat, seated on the ground in front of a stove from which rose the odour of food being kept hot.

" Sit down," she said.

He sat down. She said : " Well ? "

He dare not speak, he fixed his eyes on the table in the

middle of the room, that was laid for two grown-ups and a child. He looked at the chair with its back to the fire, the plate, the table-napkin and glasses, the bottle of red wine already opened, and the bottle of white wine still uncorked. That was his father's chair, with its back to the fire. They were expecting him. That was his bread near the fork, he knew that because the crust had been removed on account of Hautot's bad teeth. Then, raising his eyes, he noticed his father's portrait hanging on the wall, the large photograph taken at Paris the year of the Exhibition, the same one that hung above the bed in the room at Ainville.

The young woman asked again :

"Well, Monsieur César?"

She stared at him. Her face was deathly white with anxiety, and she waited, her hands trembling with fear.

Then he picked up courage :

"Well, Miss, papa died on Sunday, the first day of the season."

She was too overcome to make any movement. After a silence of a few seconds, she faltered almost inaudibly :

"Oh, it's not possible?"

Then the tears came to her eyes, and covering her face with her hands, she burst out sobbing.

Seeing his mother cry, the little boy turned round and began to roar at the top of his voice. Then, understanding that the sudden grief was caused by the unknown visitor, he threw himself upon César, caught hold of his trousers with one hand and hit his shins as hard as he could with the other. César felt bewildered, deeply affected, thus placed between the woman mourning for his father, and the child who was defending his mother. Their emotion communicated itself to him and his eyes filled with tears, so, to regain his self-control, he began to talk.

"Yes," he said, "the accident occurred on Sunday morning, at eight o'clock." And he told the story in detail, as if she

were listening to him, mentioning the most trivial matters with characteristic peasant thoroughness. The child kept up its blows ; it was now kicking his ankles.

When he reached the point of Hautot's anxiety for her, she heard her name mentioned and, taking her hands from face, asked :

"Excuse me ! I was not following you. I would like to know—would it be a bother to you to begin all over again ? "

He began the story in the same words : "The accident occurred Sunday morning at eight o'clock."

He repeated everything, at great length, with pauses and occasional reflections on his own. She listened eagerly, feeling with a woman's keen sensitiveness the events as they were unfolded, and, trembling with horror, exclaimed at intervals : "My God ! " The boy, thinking that she was all right again, left off kicking César and took hold of his mother's hand, and listened attentively as if he understood what was happening.

When the story was finished, young Hautot continued :

"Now, we'll settle matters together according to his wishes. Listen ! I am well off, he has left me plenty. I don't want you to have anything to complain about."

She interrupted quickly :

"Oh ! Monsieur César, not to-day. My heart is . . . Another time . . . another day. . . . No, not to-day. . . . If I accept, listen . . . it is not for myself . . . no, no, no, I swear. It is for the child. Besides, what you give will be placed to his account."

Whereupon César, feeling troubled, guessed the truth and stammered :

"So then . . . it is his . . . the little one ? "

"Why, yes," she said.

The young Hautot looked at his brother with confused feelings both intense and painful.

After a long silence, for she was crying again, César, very embarrassed, went on :

"Well, Mam'selle Donet, I am going. When would you like to talk this over?"

She exclaimed:

"Oh! no, don't go! don't go! Don't leave me all alone with Emile. I would die of grief. I have nobody in the world, nobody but my little one. Oh! what misery, what misery, Monsieur César. Do sit down. Tell me some more. Tell me how he spent his time at home."

César, accustomed to obey, sat down again.

She drew another chair near to his, in front of the stove on which the food prepared for lunch was bubbling, took Emile on her lap and asked César hundreds of questions about his father—such simple questions about his ordinary everyday life, that, without reasoning on the subject, he felt that she had loved Hautot with all her poor heart.

And by the natural association of his scanty thoughts he returned to the accident and began to tell her all about it again, giving the same details as before.

When he said: "He had a hole in the stomach into which you could put your two fists," she uttered a faint cry and her eyes again filled with tears. Infected by her grief, César began to weep too, and as tears always soften the heart, he bent over Emile, whose forehead was close to his own mouth, and kissed him.

Recovering her breath, the mother murmured:

"Poor boy, he is an orphan now."

"And so am I," said César.

They said no more.

But suddenly the housewife's practical instinct, accustomed to think of everything, reawakened.

"I expect you have had nothing to eat this morning, Monsieur César?"

"No, Mam'selle."

"Oh! You must be hungry. You will have a bite?"

"Thank you," he said, "I am not hungry; I have been too worried."

She replied :

" In spite of grief one must go on living, you are surely not going to refuse. Then that will keep you here a little longer. When you are gone, I don't know what I shall do."

He yielded after a little hesitation, and sitting down with his back to the fire, facing her, he ate some of the tripe that was crackling in the oven and drank a glass of red wine. But he would not allow her to uncork the white wine. Several times he wiped the child's mouth, as he had smeared his chin all over with gravy.

As he got up to go, he asked :

" When would you like me to come back to talk the matter over, Mam'selle Donet ? "

" If it is all the same to you, next Thursday, Monsieur César. I shall not waste any time that way, as I am always free on Thursdays."

" That will suit me—next Thursday."

" You will come to lunch, won't you ? "

" Oh ! as for that, I can't promise."

" Well, you know, it is easier to talk when eating. Besides, there is more time."

" Well, all right. At twelve o'clock then."

And off he went after having kissed little Emile and shaken hands with Mademoiselle Donet.

III

The week seemed long to César Hautot. He had never felt so lonely, and the solitude seemed unbearable. Hitherto he had lived with his father, just like his shadow, following him to the fields and superintending the execution of his orders ; and when he did leave him for a short time it was only to meet again at dinner. They spent their evenings sitting opposite

each other, smoking their pipes and talking about horses, cows or sheep; and the handshake they exchanged every morning was symbolic of deep family affection.

Now César was alone. He strolled about looking on while the harvesters worked, expecting at any moment to see his father's tall gesticulating form at the far end of a field. To kill time he visited his neighbours, telling all about the accident to those who had not already heard it and telling it over again to those who had. Then having reached the end of all that interested him, he would sit down at the side of the road and wonder whether this kind of life would last very long.

He often thought of Mademoiselle Donet. He remembered her with pleasure. He had found her ladylike, gentle and good, exactly as his father had described her. And she was certainly a good girl. He was determined to do the thing handsomely and give her two thousand francs a year, settling the capital on the child. He even felt a certain pleasure at the prospect of seeing her again on the following Thursday, and making all the arrangements for her future. Then, although the idea of the brother, the little chap of five—his father's son—did worry and annoy him, it also filled him with a friendly feeling. This illegitimate youngster, though he would never bear the name of Hautot, was, in a sense, a member of the family life, whom he might adopt or abandon as he pleased, but would always remind him of his father.

So that when, on Thursday morning, he was trotting along the road to Rouen on Graind'orge's back, he felt lighter-hearted, more at peace than he had done since his bereavement.

On entering Mademoiselle Donet's apartment, he saw the table laid as on the previous Thursday, the only difference being that the crust had been left on the bread.

He shook hands with the young woman, kissed Emile on both cheeks and sat down feeling more or less at home, although his heart was heavy. Mademoiselle Donet seemed to him to

have grown thinner and paler. She must have wept bitterly. She appeared rather awkward in his presence, as if she now understood what she had not felt the previous week when under the first impression of her loss. She treated him with exaggerated respect, showing stricken humility, and waiting upon him with solicitude, as if to repay by her attentions and devotion the kindness he had shown her. The lunch dragged on as they discussed the business that had brought him to the house. She did not want so much money. It was too much, far too much. She earned enough to keep herself, and she only wanted Emile to find a small sum awaiting him when he was grown up. César was firm, and even added a present of one thousand francs for her mourning.

When he had finished his coffee, she asked :

"Do you smoke?"

"Yes . . . I have my pipe."

He felt in his pocket. Good heavens! he had forgotten it. He was quite miserable until she brought out his father's pipe, which had been put away in a cupboard. He accepted it, took hold of it, recognised it and smelt it, said what a good one it was, in a voice choked with feeling, filled it with tobacco and lighted it. Then he set Emile astride on his knee and let him play at horses while the mother removed the table-cloth and put the dirty dishes aside in the bottom of the cupboard, intending to wash up as soon as he had gone.

About three o'clock he got up reluctantly, very depressed at the idea of leaving.

"Well, Mademoiselle Donet," he said, "I wish you good afternoon. It has been a pleasure to make your further acquaintance."

She stood before him, blushing, deeply moved, and gazed at him while she thought of the father.

"Shall we never see each other again?" she said.

He replied simply :

"Why, yes, Mademoiselle, if it give you any pleasure."

"Indeed it will, Monsieur César. Next Thursday, then, if that suits you?"

"Yes, Mademoiselle Donet."

"You will come to lunch, without fail?"

"Well—as you are so kind, I won't refuse."

"It's settled then, next Thursday, at twelve, the same as to-day."

"Thursday at twelve, Mademoiselle Donet!"

BOITELLE

OLD ANTOINE BOITELLE'S SPECIALITY THROUGHOUT THE country was doing the dirty jobs. Whenever a cesspool had to be cleaned out, a manure heap removed, drains flushed, or any filthy old hole attended to, he was sent for.

He would come along with the necessary implements, his sabots soaked in filth, and start work, whining all the time about his job. Then when asked why he did such repulsive work, he would reply resignedly: "Well, for my children; they must be fed. It pays better than anything else." He had fourteen children and when anyone asked what had become of them, he would say indifferently: "There are eight still at home. One is in service, and five are married." When asked whether they were happily married he replied vivaciously: "I didn't oppose them. I have never opposed them, in any way. They married as they pleased. You must never oppose their tastes, ill comes of it. If I am a scavenger, it is because my parents opposed my tastes. Otherwise I would have been a workman like the others."

This is how his parents had thwarted him:

He was a soldier then, serving his time at Havre, not more stupid than the others, not sharper either, but rather simple-minded.

In his free time his greatest pleasure was to walk along the quay where the bird-dealers congregated. Sometimes alone, sometimes with a friend from his own part of the country, he would pass slowly in front of the cages containing parrots with green backs and yellow heads from the Amazon, parrots with grey backs and red heads from Senegal, enormous macaws that

looked like birds bred in hothouses with their gorgeous feathers, their plumes, and their tufts, parakeets of all sizes that looked as if they had been painted with great care by a heavenly miniaturist, then the little tiny birds that hopped about, red, yellow, blue, variegated ; all these mingled their cries with the noise of the quay, adding to the din of vessels unloading, of passers-by and of vehicles, the wild murmur, shrill and deafening, of a distant, ghost-ridden forest.

Boitelle would stop with astonishment in his eyes and wide-open mouth, laughing and delighted, showing his teeth to the cockatoo prisoners who saluted with their white or yellow crests the bright red of his breeches and the copper buckle of his belt. When he found a bird that could talk he asked it questions, and if it happened to be a day when the bird felt disposed to enter into conversation with him or answer his questions, the amount of fun and amusement he carried away from the interview lasted till evening. He got any amount of pleasure from looking at the monkeys and could imagine no greater luxury for a wealthy man than to keep these animals as one keeps cats and dogs. He had the love of the exotic in his blood, as others have the love of hunting, medicine or the Church. He could not help going back to the quay every time the gates of the barracks were opened, drawn towards it by an irresistible longing.

Once, then, he had stopped, in something like ecstasy, in front of an enormous macaw that was puffing out its feathers, bending forward and drawing itself up as if it were curtsying at the court of Parrotland, when he saw the door of a little café adjoining the bird shop open, and a young Negress appear with a red kerchief on her head, sweeping the corks and sand from the floor into the street.

Boitelle's attention was immediately divided between the bird and the woman, and he could not have said which of the two caused him the greater astonishment or pleasure.

The Negress swept the dirt from the café into the street,

raised her eyes and, in her turn, was dazzled by the soldier's uniform. There she stood facing him with her broom in her hands as if she were presenting arms, while the macaw went on bowing.

After a few seconds the soldier began to feel embarrassed at so much attention and went off slowly, to avoid any appearance of retreat.

But he came back. He passed the Café des Colonies nearly every day and through the window often saw the little dark-skinned servant handing beer or brandy to the sailors of the port. She often came out when she caught sight of him; indeed, they were soon smiling at each other like acquaintances although they had never spoken to each other; and Boitelle felt his heart stirred when he saw the dazzling row of teeth suddenly glitter between the girl's dusky lips. One day he went in and was surprised to find that she spoke French just like every one else. The bottle of lemonade, of which she accepted a glass, remained a delightful memory to the soldier, and it soon became his custom to frequent the little tavern and drink all the syrupy mixtures he could afford.

It was a treat for him—a perpetual joy—to watch the black hand of the little serving-maid pour something into his glass while her teeth smiled even more brightly than her eyes.

After seeing each other in this way for two months they became fast friends, and Boitelle, having recovered from his surprise at finding that the ideals of this Negress were the same as those of the girls of his country, that she respected thrift, work, religion and good manners, loved her the more for it and was so infatuated that he wanted to marry her.

This suggestion made her dance for joy. She had a little money left to her by an oyster-woman who had sheltered her when abandoned by an American captain on the quay at Havre. The captain had found her when she was about six years old, huddled against the bales of cotton in the ship's hold, a few hours after leaving New York. On reaching Havre he aban-

doned the little black creature hidden on board, he knew not how or by whom, to the care of the compassionate oyster-woman. When the oyster-woman died, the young Negress went to the Café des Colonies as waitress.

Antoine Boitelle added : " We shall be married if my parents make no objections. I will never do anything against their wishes, you understand that, never ! I will mention it to them the first time I go back home."

The next week, having got twenty-four hours' leave, he went to see his people, who farmed a small holding at Tourteville, near Yvetot.

He waited till the meal was over, for the moment when coffee with a dash of brandy softens the heart, to tell his parents that he had found a girl so completely to his taste that no other so perfectly suited to him could possibly exist.

The old people, on hearing this, became cautious and asked for particulars. He told them everything except, indeed, the colour of her skin.

She was a servant, without much money, but strong, thrifty, clean, well-conducted and sensible. These were things that were more valuable than money in the hands of a bad housewife. Besides, she had a few sous left her by the woman who had brought her up, quite a number of sous, almost a little dowry—fifteen hundred francs in the savings bank. The old people, won over by his account and having confidence in his judgment, gradually gave way ; then he reached the ticklish point of the explanation. Laughing in a forced way, he said : " There is only one thing that may upset you. There is not a scrap of white about her." They could not understand what he meant and he was obliged to explain at length and with many precautions, so as to avoid shocking them, that she belonged to the dark race of which they had only seen samples in the coloured picture-books.

Then they became anxious, perplexed, alarmed as if he had proposed to marry the Devil.

The mother said : " Black ? How much of her ? Is she all black ? "

He replied : " Why, yes ; black all over, just as you are white all over ! "

The father said : " Black ? Is she as black as the kettle ? "

The son answered : " Perhaps a little bit less ! She is black but not nastily black. The curé's cassock is black enough but it is no uglier than a white surplice. "

The father said : " Are there any blacker than she is in her own country ? "

The son, with an air of conviction, exclaimed : " Certainly ! "

But the old man shook his head.

" That must be nasty. "

" It's no nastier than anything else, you soon get accustomed to it. "

The mother asked : " They don't soil their underwear more than others, those creatures ? "

" No more than you do, it's the colour of her skin. "

After a great many more questions it was agreed that the old people should see the girl before taking any decision, and that the young fellow, whose military service would be finished in another month, should bring her to the house so that they might pass judgment upon her ; then they could talk the matter over and decide whether she was too dark to be received into the Boitelle family.

Antoine accordingly announced that on Sunday, the 22nd of May, the day of his discharge, he would start for Tourteville with his sweetheart.

For the visit to her lover's parents she had put on her most beautiful and most showy clothes, in which yellow, red and blue predominated, so that she looked as if decorated for a national fête.

At Havre station everybody stared at her, and Boitelle was proud of being seen arm-in-arm with a person who attracted so much attention. Then, in the third-class carriage, seated

beside him, she caused such surprise among the peasants that those in the adjoining compartments stood up on the seats to have a good look at her over the wooden partition that divided the carriage. One child, frightened at her appearance, began to cry, another hid its face in its mother's apron.

However, all went well until they reached their destination. As the train slowed down for Yvetot, Antoine felt uncomfortable, as though at an inspection when he was not sure of himself. Then, leaning out of the window, he recognised in the distance his father holding the bridle of the horse, and his mother standing at the barrier that held back the spectators.

He alighted first, took hold of his sweetheart's hand and holding himself erect as if escorting a general, he went to meet his father and mother.

The mother, seeing this black and brilliant lady escorted by her son, was so amazed that she had not a word to say and the father found it difficult to hold the horse, that kept rearing at the engine or the Negress. But Antoine, suddenly filled with joy at seeing the old people, rushed forward with open arms, kissed his mother and his father too in spite of the nag's fright, then turning to his companion, at whom the wonder-struck passers-by stopped to stare, he explained:

"Here she is. I told you that a first glimpse was rather upsetting, but as soon as you know her, as sure as I stand here, there is nothing better in the world. Say how-d'you-do to her to make her feel at home."

Thereupon old Mother Boitelle, almost frightened out of her wits, made a sort of curtsy, while the father took off his cap and murmured: "My best wishes." Then without further delay they clambered into the cart, the two women at the back on chairs that made them bounce up and down at every jolt, and the two men in front on the seat.

No one spoke. Antoine, feeling anxious, was whistling a barrack-room song. The father whipped up the nag and the mother looked out of the corner of her eyes, casting sly glances

at the Negress, whose brow and cheek-bones shone in the sunlight like well-polished shoes.

Antoine, wanting to break the silence, turned round and said :
“ Well, has no one anything to say ? ”

“ Give us time,” replied the old woman.

He went on : “ Come ! tell us the story of your hen’s eight eggs.”

This was one of the family’s funny stories. But as his mother still kept silent, paralysed by her feelings, he started to tell the tale himself, laughing all the time, of the never-forgotten adventure. The father, who knew it by heart, cheered up at the very first words ; the mother soon followed his example, and the Negress herself burst into a fit of laughter at the funniest part, such a noisy, rolling torrent of laughter that the excited horse broke into a gallop.

This broke the ice and they started to talk.

They had scarcely reached the house and had all got down from the cart when, after taking his sweetheart to her room to change her dress, which might get stained while cooking an appetising dish that was to win the old people’s affections through their stomachs, he led his parents out of doors and, with beating heart, asked :

“ Well, what do you think ? ”

The father was silent. The mother, more courageous, exclaimed :

“ She is too black ! Too black, really. I can’t stomach it.”

“ You will get used to it,” said Antoine.

“ Possibly, but not just at first.”

They went into the house, and the good woman was touched to see the Negress busy in the kitchen. Then, tucking up her skirts, she started to help her.

The meal was good, long and enjoyable. When they were wandering round afterwards Antoine took his father aside.

“ Well, father, what do you think of her ? ”

The peasant never committed himself.

"I can't say. Ask your mother."

So Antoine joined his mother and, keeping behind the others, said: "Well, mother, what do you think of her?"

"My poor lad, really, she is too black. Only the least little bit less and I would say nothing, but it is too much. She might be Satan himself!"

He did not press her, knowing how obstinate the old woman was, but he felt a tempest of grief rage within him. He racked his brains for a solution of the difficulty, surprised that she had not taken their fancy at once, as she had taken his. So the four of them strolled through the cornfields in silence. When they passed a fence, farmers appeared at the gate and little boys climbed the hedges, every one rushed out to see the "blackie" that young Boitelle had brought home. In the distance people could be seen scampering across the fields as they do when the village crier makes some public announcement. Old Boitelle and his wife, scared at the curiosity aroused by their approach, quickened their pace, walking side by side, leaving their son far behind. His companion asked him what his parents thought of her.

Hesitatingly he replied that they had not yet made up their minds.

But in the village square there was an excited rush from all the cottages, and at sight of the gathering crowd the old Boitelles fled home, while Antoine, furious with anger, his sweetheart holding his arm, advanced majestically under the astonished gaze of the crowd.

He understood that it was all over, that there was no hope, that he could never marry his Negress; she understood it too; and they both began to cry as they drew near to the farm. As soon as they got back she took off her dress to help the old woman; she followed her everywhere, to the dairy, the stables, the poultry-run, taking upon herself the hardest work, and always saying: "Let me do it, Madame Boitelle," so that in the evening the old woman, her heart softening but still inexorable, said to her son:

"All the same she is a good girl. It is a pity she is so black, but there, she really is too black. I could never get used to it, she must go back again, she is too black!"

And young Boitelle said to his sweetheart:

"She won't have it, she says you are too black. You must go back again. I will take you to the station. Never mind, don't be miserable about it. I will talk to them when you are gone."

He took her to the station, bidding her hope, and after embracing her, put her into the train, which he watched out of sight, his eyes swollen with tears.

He appealed in vain to his parents, they would never give their consent.

When he had told this story, well known throughout the country-side, Antoine Boitelle always added:

"From that time, I have had no heart for anything, for anything whatever. I took no interest in any trade, and so I became what I am, a scavenger."

People would say to him: "Yet you have married."

"Yes, and I can't say that I disliked my wife, considering that I have had fourteen children, but she was not the other one, oh, no—certainly not! The other one, you see, my Negress, if she only looked at me, I felt I was in the seventh heaven. . . ."

THE ORDERLY

THE CEMETERY WAS FULL OF OFFICERS, AND LOOKED LIKE A field of flowers. Red caps and breeches, gold stripes and buttons, sabres, the shoulder-knots of the staff officers, the gold lace of the Chasseurs and the Hussars, all moved through the midst of the graves where black or white crosses stretched their mournful arms of iron, marble or wood over the vanished hosts of the dead.

They had been burying Colonel Limousin's wife, who had been drowned bathing two days previously.

All was over, the clergy had departed, but the Colonel, supported by two officers, remained standing before the open grave, at the bottom of which he could still see the wooden coffin which hid the mouldering corpse of his young wife.

He was getting on in years, tall and thin, with a white moustache. Three years earlier, he had married a comrade's daughter, who had been left an orphan after the death of her father, Colonel Sortis.

The captain and lieutenant upon whom their chief was leaning tried to lead him away. He resisted them, his eyes full of tears which he bravely forced back ; and murmuring in a low voice : " No, no ! wait a little," he insisted on remaining there, scarcely able to stand, on the edge of the grave, which appeared bottomless to him, an abyss which had swallowed up love and life, all that remained to him on earth.

Suddenly General Ormont approached, seized the Colonel by the arm, and dragged him away, almost by force, saying : " Come, come, old friend, you must not stay there ! " The Colonel submitted and returned home.

As he opened the door of his study, he noticed a letter lying

on his desk. Picking it up, he staggered with surprise and emotion, for he recognised his wife's handwriting. And the letter bore the postmark of that day. He tore open the envelope, and read :

" Father—I hope I may still call you Father, as I have always done. When you receive this letter, I shall be dead and buried ; thus perhaps will you be able to pardon me.

" I am not seeking to rouse your pity nor to mitigate my fault. I only wish to tell you, with all the sincerity of a woman who is going to kill herself in an hour's time, the whole and complete truth.

" When in your generosity you married me, I became yours in return, and I loved you as much as a young girl can. I loved you as I loved my own father, almost as much ; and one day when I was on your knee and you were embracing me, I called you ' Father ' in spite of myself. That cry came instinctively and spontaneously from my heart. You were indeed a father to me, nothing but a father. You laughed and said to me : ' Always call me that, my child, I like it.'

" We came to this town, and, forgive me, father, I fell in love. Oh ! I struggled for a long time against it, for nearly two years, you must understand, nearly two years, and then I yielded, I became a guilty, a ruined woman.

" What of him ? You will not guess who it was. I am quite easy in my mind on that point, since there were a dozen officers, always around me and with me, whom you used to call my twelve constellations.

" Father, do not try to find out who he is, and do not nurse any hatred of him. He has done what anyone else would have done in his place, and then, I am sure that he also loved me with all his heart.

" But listen ! one day we had arranged to meet on the island of Bécasses, you know the little island, near the wind-mill. I was to land there while swimming, and he was to wait for me in the bushes, and then remain there until the evening,

so that nobody should see him leave. I had just met him, when the branches parted, and we saw your orderly, Philip, who had taken us by surprise. I felt that we were lost, and I uttered a loud cry; but he said to me, he, you understand: 'Don't worry, my dear, go for a swim, and leave me with this man.'

"I went away, so agitated that I nearly drowned myself, and I returned to your house, waiting for something terrible to happen.

"An hour later, in the drawing-room corridor, I met Philip, who said to me in a low voice: 'I am at Madame's command, if she has a letter to give me.' I knew then that he had sold himself, and that my friend had bought his silence.

"I gave him letters indeed, all my letters. He delivered them and brought me the replies.

"That lasted about two months. We trusted him, even as you yourself trusted him.

"Now, father, see what happened. One day, on the same island to which I had gone swimming, this time alone, I again met your orderly. He was expecting me and warned me that he was going to denounce us to you and give you some letters which he had kept, stolen, if I did not yield to his desires.

"Oh! dear father, I was seized with fear, a vile, cowardly fear, above all a fear of you, so kind, yet deceived by me; fear for him also, for you would have killed him; fear for myself also, perhaps; how can I tell? I was bewildered and dismayed, so I thought that once more I would buy this wretch who also loved me. Oh, the shame of it!

"We are so weak, we women, that we lose our heads more easily than you. And then, when one has fallen, one sinks lower and lower. How could I tell what I was doing? I only knew that one of us three had to die, and I surrendered to that brute.

"You see, father, that I am not trying to make excuses for myself.

"Thereafter, what I should have foreseen happened; again

and again, by threatening me, he took advantage of me when he liked. Like the other one, he has continually been my lover. Was it not abominable? And what a punishment, father!

"At last, I decided that I must kill myself. Living, I could never have confessed such a wrong to you. In death I could dare anything. No alternative was left to me, nothing could have washed away the stain of my wickedness. I felt that I could no longer love, or be loved, and even my handshake seemed to me to be tainted.

"In a little while I am going to bathe, and I shall not come back.

"This letter for you will go to my lover's house. He will receive it after my death, and in ignorance of its contents, will send it to you in accordance with my last wish. You yourself will read it on returning from the funeral.

"Good-bye, father, I have nothing more to tell you. Do what you will, and forgive me."

The Colonel wiped the perspiration from his forehead. His self-command, the coolness of his battles, suddenly came back to him.

He rang the bell, and a servant appeared.

"Send Philip to me," he said, and half opened the drawer of his desk.

The man entered almost at once, a tall, red-whiskered soldier, with a sly look and cunning eyes.

The Colonel looked straight at him.

"You will tell me the name of my wife's lover."

"But, sir. . . ."

The officer took his revolver from the drawer.

"Now then, be quick! You know I am not to be trifled with."

"Very well, sir . . . it is Captain St. Albert."

Scarcely had he uttered the name, when a spurt of flame seared his eyes, and he fell on his face, with a bullet through the middle of his forehead.

THE RABBIT

AT THE USUAL TIME, BETWEEN FIVE AND A QUARTER PAST FIVE in the morning, old Lecacheur appeared at the door of his house to watch his men start work.

Red in the face and half-asleep—one eye open and the other nearly shut—he buttoned his braces with difficulty over his fat stomach, casting the while a keen glance round the familiar scene of the farm. The sun shed its oblique rays through the beech-trees by the ditch and the squat apple-trees in the courtyard, making the cocks on the dunghill crow, and the pigeons on the roof coo. In the fresh morning air the smell of the cow-house drifted through the open door, mingled with the pungent odour from the stable, where the neighing horses turned their heads towards the light.

As soon as his trousers were safely fastened, old Lecacheur started off, going first to the hen-house to count the morning's eggs, as he had recently suspected pilfering.

The servant-girl rushed towards him with her arms in the air, shouting :

"Master, master, a rabbit has been stolen in the night."

"A rabbit?"

"Yes, master, the big grey one from the hutch on the right."

The farmer opened his left eye wide and said simply :

"I must see to it."

And off he went. The hutch had been broken, and the rabbit was gone.

Then the man became thoughtful, closed his right eye and scratched his nose. After thinking the matter over, he told the scared servant-girl, who was standing stupidly beside him :

"Go and fetch the police. Say I expect them at once."

Old Lecacheur was mayor of his commune, Pavigny-le-Gras, over which he ruled with a high hand owing to his wealth and position.

As soon as the girl had disappeared in the direction of the village which was about five hundred yards away, the peasant went home to have his morning coffee and discuss the matter with his wife, whom he found on her knees in front of the fire, blowing it to make it burn up.

When he reached the door he said: "Now, someone has stolen a rabbit."

She turned so quickly that she slipped down on to the floor, and cried, looking at her husband in dismay: "What's that? Stolen a rabbit?"

"The big grey one."

She sighed. "What a shame! Whoever can have stolen that rabbit?"

She was a little, thin woman, energetic, neat, and an excellent housewife.

Lecacheur had his own ideas on the matter.

"It must be that fellow Polyte."

The wife suddenly got up from the floor and said in a furious voice:

"He did it! He did it! No need to hunt about for anyone else. He did it! You are right, Cacheux!"

All the avarice and fury of the careful peasant woman against the manservant, who is always suspect, and the servant-girl; who is always suspected, showed in the contraction of her mouth and in the wrinkles in the cheeks and forehead of her thin, angry face.

"What have you done?" she asked.

"I have sent for the police."

Polyte was a labourer who had been employed on the farm for a few days and dismissed by Lecacheur for insolence. He had been a soldier and was said to have kept the habits of pilfering and debauchery acquired in his African campaigns.

He turned his hand to all trades. He was mason, navvy, carter, reaper, stone-breaker, or tree-pruner, but above all, loafer. Not only could he never keep a place, but he was often obliged to go to different parts of the country to find a job.

From the very first day that he came to the farm, Lecacheur's wife had detested him, and now she was sure that he had committed the theft.

In about half an hour the two policemen arrived. Sergeant Sénateur was very tall and thin, Constable Lenient was short and fat.

Lecacheur made them sit down and told them all about it. Then they visited the scene of the theft to verify the destruction of the hutch and to collect evidence. When they got back to the kitchen, the mistress of the house brought out some wine, filled up the glasses and asked with a defiant glance :

"Are you going to catch him?"

The Sergeant, his sabre between his legs, seemed anxious. Of course he was sure to catch the thief if he were pointed out to him. If not, he could not promise to find the culprit. After long reflection he asked this simple question :

"Do you know the thief?"

An expression of Norman cunning crept round Lecacheur's big mouth, and he replied :

"I can't say I know him, since I didn't see him steal. If I had seen him I would have made him eat the beast raw, skin and flesh too, without a drop of cider to help it down. So I can't actually say who it is, but I'm sure it's that good-for-nothing Polyte."

Then he related at length his troubles with Polyte, why the man had left his service, his scowling face, the tales that were told about him ; piling up insignificant, petty details.

The sergeant, who listened attentively although he was always emptying and refilling his glass, turned towards the constable and said casually :

"We must search the cottage of the shepherd Severin's wife."

The constable smiled and nodded his head three times in reply.

Then Madame Lecacheur came up and in her turn, and with all a peasant's artfulness, very gently questioned the sergeant. This shepherd Severin, a natural, a sort of animal, had grown up on the hillside surrounded by his roaming, bleating flock, knowing nothing about anything but sheep. Nevertheless he had the peasant's instinct for saving. For years and years he must have hidden in hollow trees and in crevices of rocks all that he earned either as a keeper of flocks or as an animal doctor, healing sprains by his touch and his spells—for the bone-setter's secret had been handed down to him by an old shepherd whose place he had taken. Then one day he bought at public auction for three thousand francs a little bit of land consisting of a cottage and field.

A few months later his marriage was announced. He married the innkeeper's servant, a woman notorious for her immorality. The boys of the village said that the girl, knowing he was fairly well off, had been going to his hut every night, had taken him, conquered him, and had gradually persuaded him to marry her.

After they were married she went home to the house which her man had bought, and here she lived while he went on watching his flocks, night and day, on the plains.

The sergeant added :

"Polyte has been sleeping with her for three weeks, the scoundrel has no other shelter."

The constable ventured to say :

"He is taking the shepherd's blankets."

Madame Lecacheur, seized by a fresh fit of rage that was intensified by a married woman's anger against impropriety, exclaimed :

"I am sure it is she. Go at once. Ah ! the blackguards !"

But the sergeant calmly said :

"One minute. Let us wait until twelve o'clock ; as he goes

there to dinner every day I will catch them with their noses over it."

The constable smiled, pleased at his chief's idea. Lacacheur smiled too, for the shepherd's story seemed funny to him—betrayed husbands are always a joke.

Twelve o'clock had just struck when Sergeant Sénateur, followed by his man, knocked gently three times at the door of a little lonely house, at the corner of a wood, five hundred yards from the village.

They were standing waiting close against the wall so as not to be seen from inside. After a minute or two, as nobody answered, the sergeant knocked again. The house seemed empty, it was so quiet, but the constable Lenient, whose hearing was very good, said that someone was moving about inside.

Then Sénateur got angry. He would not allow anyone to defy the authority of the law for one second, so knocking at the wall, he shouted :

"Open the door."

As this order produced no effect, he roared :

"If you do not do as I bid you, I shall smash the lock. I am sergeant of police, by God ! Here, Lenient."

He had not finished before the door opened and Sénateur saw a fat woman with a red face, swollen cheeks, drooping breasts, protruding stomach and big hips, a coarse, female animal : the wife of Severin the shepherd.

He went in, saying :

"I have come to see you about a little investigation I must make."

He looked round. On the table a plate, a jug of cider, and a half-filled glass indicated the beginning of a meal. Two knives were lying side by side and the shrewd constable winked at his chief and said : "It smells good," adding gaily : "I would swear it was stewed rabbit."

"Will you have a brandy ?" the peasant women asked.

"No, thank you. I only want the skin of the rabbit you are eating."

She pretended not to understand, but was trembling in every limb.

"What rabbit?"

The sergeant had sat down and was calmly wiping his brow.

"Come, come, mother, you are not going to try to make us believe that you live on couch-grass. What were you eating, all by yourself, for your dinner?"

"Me, nothing, nothing, I swear. A tiny bit of butter on my bread."

"The deuce, my good woman, a tiny bit of butter on your bread . . . you are making a mistake. What you mean is a tiny bit of butter on the rabbit. Damn it all! your butter smells good! It is special butter, extra good, wedding butter, special frying-butter, surely, not ordinary household butter, butter like that!"

The constable, doubled up with laughter, repeated:

"Surely, not ordinary household butter."

As Sergeant Sénateur was fond of a joke, the local police all indulged in witticisms.

He continued: "Where do you keep your butter?"

"My butter?"

"Yes, your butter."

"Well, in the pot."

"What pot?"

"The butter-pot, of course! Here it is."

She brought out an old cup with a layer of salt, rancid butter in the bottom. The sergeant sniffed at it and, shaking his head, said: "That's not the same. I want the butter that smells of stewed rabbit. Come, Lenient, let us have a look round; you look on the sideboard, my boy, I am going to look under the bed."

Having closed the door, he went up to the bed and tried to move it, but it was fixed to the wall and had apparently not

been moved for over fifty years. Then, the sergeant bending down, his uniform cracked, and a button gave way.

"Lenient," he said.

"Sergeant?"

"Come over here to the bed, my boy. I am too tall to see underneath. I will look after the sideboard." He got up and waited while the man carried out his orders.

Lenient, short and fat, took off his helmet, threw himself on his stomach, and gluing his head to the ground, gazed for some time into the black hollow under the bed. Then he suddenly cried out: "I've got him! I've got him!"

The sergeant bent over the constable: "What have you got, the rabbit?"

"No, the thief!"

"The thief! Fetch him out, fetch him out!"

The constable, whose arms were both under the bed, was pulling at something with all his strength. At last with his right hand he pulled out a foot wearing a heavy shoe. The sergeant caught hold of it: "Courage, courage! pull hard!"

Lenient, who was now on his knees, pulled at the other leg. But it was hard work, for the prisoner was kicking steadily, rolling about and arching his back, wedged up against the cross-bar of the bed by his hips.

"Courage, courage! Pull," cried Sénateur.

They pulled so hard that the cross-bar gave way and the man's body was dragged out, but not his head, which he still kept concealed in his hiding-place.

At last they managed to get it out too, and they saw the angry, terrified face of Polyte, whose arms were still under the bed.

"One more pull!" cried the sergeant. Then there was a strange sound, and as arms followed shoulders, and hands followed arms, and in the hands a sauce-pan handle, and at the end of the handle, the saucepan, containing the stewed rabbit. "Hurrah, hurrah!" bellowed the sergeant, wild with joy, while Lenient made sure of the prisoner.

The rabbit-skin, undeniable proof of theft, the last and most damning piece of evidence, was discovered in the mattress.

Then the police returned to the village in triumph with the prisoner, the stewed rabbit, and the rabbit-skin.

A week later, the whole affair having made a considerable stir, Master Lecacheur, on arriving at the Hall to discuss matters with the schoolmaster, was told that the shepherd Severin had been waiting for an hour to see him.

He was sitting on a chair in the corner with his stick between his legs. When he caught sight of the mayor he got up, took off his cap and bowed, saying: "Good day, Master Cacheux," and remained standing, timid and awkward.

"What do you want?" said the farmer.

"Well, Master Cacheux, is it true that a rabbit was stolen from your place the other week?"

"Yes, that's true, Severin."

"Ah, then it's really true?"

"Yes, my good fellow."

"And who stole the rabbit?"

"Polyte Ancas, the labourer."

"Good. And is it really true that he was found under my bed?"

"What, the rabbit?"

"The rabbit and Polyte as well, one at one end and the other at the other."

"Yes, my poor Severin. That's true."

"Then it's really true?"

"Yes. Who told you about it?"

"Pretty well everybody. I understand. And then, and then, well, you must know all about marriage, seeing that you as a mayor marry people."

"What about marriage?"

"I mean about one's rights."

"What do you mean by one's rights?"

"All about the rights of husband and wife."

"Yes, I know all that."

"Well, then, tell me, Master Cacheux, has my wife the right to sleep with Polyte?"

"What do you mean, to sleep with Polyte?"

"Yes, has she the right, according to law and seeing that she is my wife, to sleep with Polyte?"

"No, no, of course not, she has not the right."

"If I find her at it again, have I the right to beat her? To beat her and him too?"

"Why . . . why . . . why, yes."

"That's all right and settled. Now I am going to tell you why I asked."

"One night last week, as I had my doubts, I went home and found them there, and not lying back to back, mind you. I chucked Polyte out of doors to sleep; but that was all, as I did not know what my rights were. This time I did not see them, I heard about it. Well, it's over, we will say no more about it. But if I catch them at it again . . . by G——, if I catch them at it again, I'll make them lose the taste for this kind of joke, Master Cacheux, as sure as my name is Severin. . . ."

ONE EVENING

THE STEAMER "KLEBER" HAD STOPPED AND I LOOKED IN delight at the beautiful Gulf of Bougie that spread out ahead of us. The Kabyle forests covered the high mountains; in the distance the yellow sand edged the blue sea with powdered gold, while the sun fell in torrents of fire over the white houses of the little town.

The warm African breeze wafted the delightful odour of the desert to my nostrils, the odour of that great, mysterious continent into which men from the North rarely penetrate. For three months I had been wandering on the borders of that vast, unknown world, on the outskirts of that strange land of the ostrich, camel, gazelle, hippopotamus, gorilla, elephant and Negro. I had seen the Arab galloping in the wind, like a waving standard. I had slept under the brown tents, in the shifting homes of these white birds of the desert. I was drunk with light, with magic, and with wide horizons.

But now after this final excursion I had to leave, go back to France, to Paris, that city of futile gossip, of commonplace preoccupations, and of continual handshaking. I must say farewell to these things so beloved, so novel, so briefly glimpsed, so deeply regretted.

A fleet of small boats surrounded the steamer. I jumped into one belonging to a young Negro, and was soon on the quay near the old Saracen gate, whose grey ruins at the entrance of the Kabyle quarter looked like an old family escutcheon.

As I was standing beside my suit-case, looking at the big vessel at anchor in the roads, and filled with admiration at the beauty of the coast, the circle of mountains bathed by blue waters more exquisite than those of Naples, as beautiful as those

of Ajaccio and Porto in Corsica, I felt a heavy hand on my shoulder.

I turned to find a tall man with a long beard, dressed in a straw hat and white flannels, by my side, staring at me with blue eyes.

"Are you not my old schoolmate?" he said.

"Possibly. What is your name?"

"Trémoulin."

"By Jove! You were in my class."

"Ah! Old chap, I recognised you at once."

And his long beard was rubbed against my cheeks.

He seemed so glad, so jolly, so happy to see me that in an outburst of friendliness I squeezed both hands of my former schoolfellow and felt very pleased to meet him again.

For four years Trémoulin had been my greatest friend at school. In those days his tall, thin body seemed to carry an over-heavy head, a large, round head that bent his neck first to the right, then to the left, and crushed the narrow chest of the long-legged schoolboy.

Trémoulin was the great prize-winner of our class: he was very intelligent, gifted with marvellous facility, a rare suppleness of mind and an instinctive leaning towards literature. We were quite convinced at college that he would turn out a celebrated man, a poet no doubt, for he wrote poetry and was full of ingeniously sentimental ideas. His father, who was a chemist in the Panthéon district, was believed not to be well off.

As soon as he had taken his Bachelor's degree I lost sight of him.

"What are you doing here?" I exclaimed.

He replied, smiling: "I am a settler."

"What? You plant things?"

"And harvest them."

"What?"

"Grapes, from which I make wine."

"You are successful?"

"Very."

"I am very glad, old chap."

"Were you going to an hotel?"

"Of course."

"Well, then, you must come home with me instead."

"But . . ."

"That's settled."

And he said to the young Negro who was watching us :
"Home, Ali."

Ali replied : "Yes, sir," and started running with my suitcase on his shoulder, raising the dust with his black feet.

Trémoulin caught hold of my arm and led me off. First he asked questions about my journey, my impressions, and seemed to like me better than ever for my enthusiastic reply. His home was an old Moorish house with an inner courtyard, having no windows on the street and dominated by a terrace which, in its turn, dominated those of the neighbouring houses, the gulf, the forests, the mountains, and the sea.

I exclaimed : "Ah ! That's the real thing, the East casts its spell over me in this spot. What a lucky dog you are to live here ! What nights you must spend on the terrace ! Do you sleep there ?"

"Yes, in summer. We will go up this evening. Do you like fishing ?"

"What kind ?"

"Fishing by torchlight."

"Yes. I love it."

"Well, we'll go after dinner, then come back and have cool drinks on the roof."

After I had had a bath, he took me to see the captivating Kabyle town, a real cascade of white houses tottering down towards the sea, then we returned home at nightfall, and after a superb dinner, set off for the quay.

We could see nothing but the lights of the streets and the stars, the big twinkling, shining stars of the African heavens.

A boat was waiting in a corner of the harbour. As soon as we got in, a man whose face I could not distinguish began to row, while my friend got the brazier ready for lighting. He said to me : " You know, I do the spearing. No one is better at it."

" My congratulations."

We had rounded a kind of mole and were now in a little bay full of high rocks whose shadows looked like towers built in the water, and I suddenly realised that the sea was phosphorescent. The oars which beat it gently and rhythmically kindled, as they fell, a weird, moving flame that followed in our wake and then died out. Bending over, I watched the flow of pale light scattered by the oars—the indescribable fire of the sea, that chilly fire kindled by a movement, that dies as soon as the waters return to rest. The three of us glided over the stream of light through the darkness.

Where were we going? I could not see my companions, I could see nothing but the luminous ripple and the sparks of water thrown up by the oars. The heat was intense. The darkness seemed as if it had been heated in an oven, and I felt uneasy in my mind about this mysterious voyage with the two men in the silently moving boat.

Dogs—those thin Arabian dogs with red coats, pointed muzzles and bright eyes—were barking in the distance, as they bark every night in this vast land, from the shore of the sea to the depth of the desert where wandering tribes pitch their tents. Foxes, jackals, hyenas, answered back ; and doubtless, not far away, a solitary lion was growling in some pass of the Atlas Mountains.

Suddenly the boatman stopped. Where could we be? I heard a faint scratching noise close to me and by the light of a match I saw a hand—only a hand—carrying the fragile light towards the iron grating, piled up with wood like a floating funeral pyre, that hung from the bow.

I gazed, surprised, at this novel, disquieting scene, and

excitedly watched the slender flame reach out towards a handful of dried heather, that began to crackle.

Then in the sleeping night, the burning, heavy night, a sheet of flame shot up, illuminating under the dark pall that hung over us, the boat and two men—an old, thin, pale, wrinkled sailor with a knotted kerchief on his head, and Trémoulin, whose fair beard shone in the gleam.

“Forward,” he shouted, and the old man began to row, surrounded by the blaze of fire, under the dome of mobile dusk that accompanied us. Trémoulin kept throwing wood on the brazier, which was now burning brightly.

I bent over the side again and saw the bottom of the sea. A few feet below the boat that strange kingdom of the waters unfolded itself—waters which give life to beast and plant, like the air above. The brazier cast its brilliant light as far as the rocks, and we glided over amazing forests of red, pink, green and yellow weeds. Between them and us there lay a crystal-clear medium that made them look fairy-like, turning them into a dream—a dream springing from the depths of the ocean. This clear, limpid water that one knew was there without seeing it, caused a strange feeling of unreality to come between us and this weird vegetation, making it as mysterious as the land of dreams.

At times the weeds came up to the surface, like floating hair, hardly stirred by the slow passage of the boat.

Among the seaweed thin silver fish darted about, visible for a second, then lost to sight. Others, still asleep, floated about in the watery undergrowth, gleaming, graceful, and impossible to catch. A crab would run off to hide itself in a hole, or a bluish, transparent jelly-fish, hardly visible—a pale azure-coloured flower, a real flower of the sea—allowed its liquid mass to be dragged along in the slight ripple made by the boat. Then, suddenly, the ground at the bottom disappeared under a fog of thickened glass, and I saw huge rocks and gloomy-coloured seaweed, vaguely illuminated by the light from the brazier.

Trémoulin, who was standing in the bows with his body bent forward, holding the sharp pointed trident called a spearing-hook in his hands, watched rocks, weeds, and water, with the intensity of a beast in pursuit of its prey. Suddenly, with a quick, gentle movement, he darted the forked head of his weapon into the sea so swiftly that it speared a large fish swimming away from us.

I had seen nothing but Trémoulin's sudden movement, but I heard him grunt with joy and as he raised his hook in the light of the brazier I saw a wriggling conger-eel, pierced by the iron teeth. After looking at it and showing it to me while he held it over the fire, my friend threw it into the bottom of the boat. The sea-serpent, with its body pierced by five wounds, slid and crawled about, and grazed my feet in its search for a hole to escape by; then, having found a pool of brackish water between the ribs of the boat, it crouched there almost dead, twisting itself round and round.

Every minute Trémoulin was gathering up, with remarkable skill and amazing rapidity, all the strange inhabitants of the salt waters. In turn I saw held over the fire, convulsed with agony, silver catfish, eels, spotted with blood, serrated sea-horses, squids, and weird-looking fish that spat out ink and turned the sea black for some moments all round the boat.

I thought I heard the cry of birds in the night and raised my head in an attempt to see from whence came the sharp, whistling sounds, now short, now long, now near, now far away. They were innumerable, ceaseless, as though a cloud of wings were hovering over us, attracted doubtless by the fire. At times the noise seemed to deceive the ear and come from the sea.

I asked: "What is that whistling?"

"The falling cinders."

The noise was indeed caused by the brazier dropping a shower of burning twigs into the sea. They fell down red-hot or in flames, and went out with a soft, penetrating, queer protest, sometimes like a chuckle and sometimes like the short

call of a passing bird on the wing. Drops of resin droned like cannon-balls or hornets and suddenly expired in their plunge into the water. It really seemed the voices of living creatures, an indescribable, faint murmur of life straying about in the shadow near us.

Suddenly Trémoulin shouted : " Ah—the beggar ! "

He threw his spear and when he pulled it up I saw what looked like a big lump of throbbing red flesh wrapped round the teeth of the fork and sticking to the wood. It was an octopus that was twining and untwining long, soft tentacles covered with suckers around the handle.

He held up his victim and I saw the sea monster's two huge eyes look at me ; bulging, terrible eyes that emerged from a kind of pocket like a tumour. The beast, thinking it was free, slowly stretched out one of its feelers in my direction. The end was as fine as a piece of thread and as soon as the greedy arm had hooked itself on to the seat, another was uncurled and raised itself to follow the first. There was a feeling of irresistible force about that soft, sinewy mass, this living bladder, red and flabby. Trémoulin opened his knife and plunged it swiftly between the beast's eyes. We heard a sigh, a sound of escaping air, and the octopus ceased to move. It was not dead, however, for life is tenacious in this sinewy body, but its power was destroyed, its pump burst, it would never again drink blood or suck a crab dry.

Trémoulin unwound the now useless tentacles from the sides of the boat and suddenly filled with anger, shouted : " Wait a bit, I'll make it hot for you."

With a stroke of the spear he picked up the beast, raised it in the air, held it to the fire, rubbing the thin, fleshy ends of its arms against the red-hot bars of the brazier. They crackled as the heat of the fire twisted and contracted them, and I ached all over at the idea of how the hideous beast must be suffering.

" Don't do that," I cried.

He replied quite calmly : " Bah ! Anything's good enough

for that thing," and threw the burst, lacerated body of the octopus into the boat, where it dragged itself between my legs to the hole full of brackish water and lay down to die amongst the dead fish.

And so our fishing continued until the wood began to run short. When there was not enough to keep the fire going, Trémoulin thrust the brazier into the water, and night, which the brilliant flames had kept at a distance, fell upon us, wrapping us once more in its gloom.

The old sailor began to row slowly and regularly. I had no idea where was the port or where land, where the sea or where the entrance to the gulf. The octopus still moved about close to my feet and I suffered physically as if I too had been burnt. Suddenly I saw lights : we were entering the port.

"Are you sleepy?" my friend asked.

"No, not in the least."

"Then let us go and have a talk on the roof."

"With pleasure."

Just as we reached the terrace I saw the crescent moon rising behind the mountains. The warm breath of the wind slipped slowly by, full of faint, almost imperceptible, odours, as if it were sweeping up the scents of all the gardens and towns of every sun-scorched country, on its way.

Around us the white houses with their square roofs descended towards the sea, we could see human forms lying down or standing up on the roofs, either asleep or dreaming in the starlight; whole families wrapped in long, flannel garments resting in the hush of the night from the heat of the day.

Suddenly it seemed as if the soul of the East was taking possession of me, that poetic, legendary soul of those simple and fanciful peoples. My mind was full of the Bible and the *Arabian Nights*; I heard prophets telling of miracles, and saw princesses in silk trousers pass by on palace terraces, while incense burned in silver lamps, and its smoke curled up in the shape of genii.

I said to Trémoulin : " You are lucky to live here."

He replied : " Chance brought me here."

" Chance ? "

" Yes, chance and misfortune."

" You have been unhappy ? "

" Very."

He was standing up in front of me, wrapped in his burnous, and the tone of his voice made me shiver, it was so full of misery.

After a moment's silence he continued :

" I can tell you my grief. It may do me good to talk about it."

" Tell me."

" Do you really mean it ? "

" Yes."

" Very well, then. You remember what I was like at college : more or less a poet, brought up in a chemist's shop. My dream was to write books, and I tried after I had taken my degree. I had no success. I published a volume of verse, then a novel, without selling more of one than of the other, then I wrote a play which was never acted.

" Then I fell in love, but I am not going to tell you about that.

" Next door to my father's shop there lived a tailor, who had a daughter. It was she I loved. She was intelligent and had passed Higher School Examinations, and her mind was alert and vivacious—in fact, very like her body. She looked fifteen, although she was really twenty-two. She was very small, with refined features, a slim figure, a delicate complexion, in every way like a dainty water-colour. Her nose, mouth, her blue eyes and fair hair, her smile, figure, hands, indeed her whole being, seemed more fit for a glass case than for an open-air life. Nevertheless she was vivacious, supple in her movements and incredibly active. I was very much in love with her. Two or three walks in the Luxembourg Gardens, near the Médicis fountain, I remember as the happiest time of my life.

You must know all about that queer phase of love's folly when every thought is centred on worship of the loved one. You are nothing but a maniac haunted by a woman, nothing exists in the world but her.

"We were soon engaged. I told her of my plans for the future, of which she disapproved. She did not believe in me as a poet, novelist, or dramatic author, and thought that trade, if successful, could procure perfect happiness. So I gave up the idea of writing books, I resigned myself to selling them and bought a book-shop—the Universal Library—at Marseilles, its former owner being dead.

"I had three good years there. We made our shop into a kind of literary *salon* where all the cultured men in the town met for conversation. They came to the shop as they would have gone to a club, and discussed books, poets, and more especially politics. My wife, who was the head of the sales department, was very popular in the town; as for me, while they were all talking downstairs I was at work in my study on the first floor which communicated with the shop by a winding staircase. I heard voices, laughter, discussions, and sometimes stopped writing to listen to what was going on. I was secretly writing a novel—which I never finished.

"The most regular frequenters were Monsieur Montana, a man of private means, a tall, handsome man of Southern type, with black hair and eyes full of flattery; Monsieur Barbet, a magistrate; two business men, Messieurs Faucil and Labar-règue; and General the Marquis de Flèche, head of the Royalist party, the most important man in the province, an old man of sixty-six.

"Business was good and I was happy, very happy. But, one day about three o'clock I was passing the Rue Saint-Ferréol on an errand and saw come out of a house a woman whose figure was so like my wife's that I would have said to myself 'It is she' had I not left her ill at home.

"She was walking ahead of me very quickly, and never

looking back ; in spite of myself I started to follow her with a feeling of surprise and uneasiness. I said to myself :

“ ‘ It is not she. No. That’s impossible, as she had a headache. Besides, what would she be doing in that house ? ’ ”

“ Still, I wanted to be sure, so hurried after her. Whether she felt or guessed I was behind her or whether she recognised my step, I can’t say, but she turned round suddenly. It was she ! When she saw me she blushed and stopped, then said with a smile : ‘ Halloa, is it you ? ’ ”

“ I felt sick at heart. I said : ‘ Yes. So you did go out ? And your headache ? ’ ”

“ ‘ It was better. I have been on an errand. ’ ”

“ ‘ Where to ? ’ ”

“ ‘ To Laussade’s, in the Rue Cassinelli, to order some pencils. ’ ”

“ She looked me full in the face. She was not blushing now ; on the contrary, she was rather pale. Her clear, limpid eyes—ah ! a woman’s eyes !—seemed full of truth, but I had a vague, painful feeling that they were full of lies. I was more embarrassed, more uncomfortable than she, I dared not suspect her, and yet I felt sure she was telling me a lie. Why was she doing it ? I had no idea, so I merely said : ‘ You were quite right to go out if you felt better. ’ ”

“ ‘ Yes. I felt much better. ’ ”

“ ‘ Are you going home ? ’ ”

“ ‘ Why, yes. ’ ”

“ I left her and wandered about the streets alone. What was going on ? While I was talking to her I knew instinctively that she was lying, but now I could not believe it, and when I went home to dinner I was angry with myself for having suspected her, even for a moment. ”

“ Have you ever been jealous ? No matter. The first hot breath of jealousy had touched my heart. I had no definite suspicion I only knew that she had lied. You must remember that every evening when we were alone together, after all the

customers and the clerks had left, either when strolling down towards the port in fine weather, or else in my study when the weather was bad, I opened my heart to her without reserve, for I loved her. She was part of my life, the greater part, and all my happiness, and in her little hands she held captive my poor trusting, faithful heart.

"In the early days of doubt and distress, before suspicion grew into a certainty, I was depressed and chilled, as one feels before a serious illness. I was always cold, really cold, and could neither eat nor sleep.

"Why had she lied to me? What was she doing in that house? I had been there to try and find out, but without success. The man who lived on the first floor, an upholsterer, told me all about his neighbours but gave me no clue. A midwife lived on the second floor, a dressmaker and a manicurist on the third, and two cabmen with their families in the attics.

"Why had she lied to me? It would have been so easy to say that she was coming from the dressmaker or the manicurist. Oh! how I longed to ask them questions, too. I did not for fear she might be warned, and guess my suspicions.

"One thing was certain, she had been to the house and was concealing the fact from me, so that there was some mystery. But what? At times I thought there must be a good reason, some hidden charitable deed, some information she wanted, and I accused myself for suspecting her. Have we not all the right to our little, innocent secrets, to that second, inner life for which we are not obliged to account to anybody? Because he has been given a young girl as companion, has a man the right to expect that she shall never have a thought, can never do anything, without telling him about it? Does marriage mean the renunciation of all liberty, all independence? Might she not have gone to the dressmaker's without telling me, and might she not be helping the wife of one of the cabmen? Perhaps she thought that, without blaming her, I might criticise the reason she had for going to the house, although there was

no harm in it. She knew me through and through, all my slightest peculiarities, and probably was afraid, if not of being reproached, at least of a discussion. She had very pretty hands, and I ended by thinking that she was having them secretly manicured in the suspected house, and that she would not confess to it so as to avoid any appearance of extravagance. She was very methodical and thrifty and looked after the household expenses most carefully. Doubtless she would have felt herself lowered in my eyes had she admitted to this slight piece of feminine extravagance. Women's souls are full of subtlety and natural trickery.

"But all my reasoning failed to reassure me. I was jealous. My suspicions tormented me, torturing and preying upon my mind. As yet it was not 'a suspicion,' but simply 'suspicion.' I endured misery and frightful anguish. An obscure thought possessed me—a thought covered with a veil—and a veil I dared not raise, for beneath it lay a terrible doubt. . . . A lover! . . . Had she a lover? . . . Think of it! think of it! It was unlikely, impossible . . . and yet? . . .

"Montina's face was always before my eyes. I saw the tall fop, with his shiny hair, smiling into her face, and I said to myself: 'It is he.' I made up a story of their intrigue. They had been talking of a book, discussing some amorous adventure, finding an incident similar to their own, and from this had followed the rest. I kept a lookout, a prey to the most abominable torture that man can endure. I bought shoes with rubber soles so that I could move about silently, and I spent my life going up and down the little winding staircase to catch them. Once I crept down the stairs on my hands, head-first, to see what they were doing. Then I had to go up again backwards, with great difficulty, after finding that the clerk was always there with them. I lived in a state of continual suffering. I could think of nothing, I could not work, nor could I look after the business. As soon as I had left the house, as soon as I had walked a hundred yards along the street, I said to myself:

'He is there,' and back I went. He was not, so I went out again! But I had hardly left the house when I thought: 'He has come now,' and returned again.

"This went on every day.

"The night was worse still, for I felt her by my side, in my bed. There she was, asleep, or pretending to be asleep! Was she asleep? Of course not. Then that was another lie?

"I lay motionless on my back, on fire from the warmth of her body, panting and in agony. I was filled with a vile yet potent desire to get up, take a candle and hammer and with a single stroke split her head open to see what was inside! I knew that I would find nothing but a mess of brains and blood, nothing else. I would have learnt nothing. Impossible to find anything out! And her eyes! When she looked at me, I was seized with a wild fit of fury. You may look at her—she looks back at you! Her eyes are clear, candid—and false, false, false! and no one can guess what lies behind them. I longed to stick needles into them, to burst open the mirrors of deceit.

"How well I understand the Inquisition! I could have twisted her wrists in the iron bracelets.—Speak. . . . Confess! . . . You won't? Just wait! . . . I could have strangled her by degrees. . . . Speak, confess! . . . You won't? . . . And I would have squeezed, squeezed, until her throat began to rattle, until she choked to death. . . . Or else I would have burned her fingers over the fire. . . . Oh! that I would have done with great pleasure! . . . Speak . . . speak then. . . . You won't? I would have held them on the red-hot coal, they would have been roasted at the tips . . . then she would have spoken . . . surely! . . . she would have spoken. . . ."

Trémoulin, standing erect with clenched fists, shouted his story. On the neighbouring roofs, around us, the ghostly shadows awoke and sat up, they listened, disturbed in their sleep.

As for me, I was deeply moved, and enthralled. In the darkness I saw before me the little woman, the little, fair, vivacious,

artful woman, as if I had known her. I saw her selling her books, talking to the men who found her childlike manner disturbing, and in her delicate doll-like head I could see the little, sly ideas, the wild visions, the dreams of a musk-scented milliner, who hangs them on the hero of every romantic novel. I suspected her as I did him. I hated and detested her, and would willingly have burned her fingers, too, to make her confess.

Yasmina Hamed
He continued more calmly: "I don't know why I am telling you all this. I have never yet spoken about it. Never, but I have seen nobody for two years. I have not talked to a single person, and the whole thing was seething within me like fermenting wine. I am emptying my heart of its pain, and you come in for it.

"Well, I had made a mistake, it was worse than I thought, much worse. Just listen. I fell back on the usual trick, I pretended to go away. Every time I left the house my wife lunched out. I need not tell you how I bribed a waiter at the restaurant so that I might catch them.

"The door of the private room was to be opened for me and I arrived at the appointed time determined to kill them both. I could imagine the whole scene as clearly as if it had already occurred. I could see myself going in. A small table covered with glasses, bottles, and plates separated her from Montana, and they were so surprised when they saw me that they did not attempt to move. Without saying a word I brought down the loaded stick I was carrying on the man's head; killed by one blow, he would crumple up with his face on the table. Then, turning towards her—I gave her time—a few seconds—to understand what was happening, and to stretch her arms out to me, mad with terror, before dying in her turn. Oh I was quite ready. Strong, determined, and happy, happy to the point of intoxication. The idea of the terrified look she would cast at the raised stick, of her hands stretched out imploringly, of her strangled cry, of her face, suddenly livid

and convulsed, avenged me beforehand. I had no intention of killing her at one blow! You think me cruel, don't you? But you don't know what a man suffers, to think that a woman—wife or mistress—he loves is giving herself to another, surrenders herself to him as she had done to you, and accepts his kisses as she has done yours. It is terrible, appalling. He who has suffered that agony is capable of anything. I am surprised there are not more murders, for all who have been betrayed—every one of them—want to kill, have gloated over the idea of death: in the solitude of their own room or on a lonely road, haunted by the hallucination of satisfied vengeance, they have in imagination strangled the betrayer or beaten him to death.

"I arrived at the restaurant and asked whether they were there. The bribed waiter replied: 'Yes, sir,' and, taking me upstairs, showed me a door, saying: 'In here.' I grasped my stick as if my fingers were made of iron, and went in.

"The moment was well chosen. They were kissing each other, but it was not Montana. It was General de Flèche, the sixty-six-year-old General.

"I was so sure I was going to find the other one there that I was rigid with surprise.

"Besides . . . besides . . . I don't yet know exactly how it all happened. If I had found the other I would have been wild with rage! But this one! This old, pot-bellied man with his hanging cheeks made me choke with disgust. That child, who looked about fifteen, had given herself to this fat old man almost in his dotage, because he was a Marquis, a General, the friend and representative of dethroned kings. No, I can't say what I felt, nor what I thought about it. I could not raise my hand against the old man. It would have been disgraceful. No, I no longer wanted to kill my own wife, but all women capable of such behaviour. I was not jealous now, I felt as full of despair as if I had seen the Horror of Horrors!

"You may say what you like about men, they are not so

vile as that! If you do meet one he is held up to universal derision. The husband or lover of an old woman is more despised than a thief. We men are a decent lot, as a rule, but they, they are prostitutes with hearts full of filth. They give themselves to all men, young or old, for the most contemptible reasons, because it is their profession, their vocation, their function in life. They are the eternal, unconscious, placid prostitutes who give their bodies without disgust because it is the merchandise of love, whether they sell them to the old man with money in his pocket who hangs about the streets, or whether they give them, for the glory of it, to a lewd old monarch, or to a celebrated and repulsive old man! . . ."

He cried aloud like a prophet of old, in a tone of wrath, under the starry sky. With the fury of desperation he told about the exalted shame of all the mistresses of kings: the shame, considered worthy of respect, of all young girls who marry old men; and the tolerance showed to all young wives who smilingly accept old men's kisses.

As he called them up I could see them all from the beginning of time, surging around us in the Eastern night: girls, beautiful girls with vile souls who, like beasts that know not the age of the male, are docile to senile desire. They rose up before me, the handmaids of the patriarchs praised in the Bible, Hagar, Ruth, Lot's daughters, dark Abigail, the virgin of Shunam whose caresses restored David to life, and all those others, young, fat, white patricians or plebeians, irresponsible females belonging to a master, the unclean flesh of submissive slaves, whether paid for in money or bought by the glamour of greatness.

I asked: "What did you do?"

"I went away," he replied, simply. "And here I am."

For a long time we stayed together without saying a word, just dreaming! . . .

I have retained an unforgettable impression of that evening. All that I had seen, felt, heard, guessed; the fishing excursion,

perhaps the octopus too, and that harrowing story amid white phantoms on the neighbouring roofs, all combined to produce a unique sensation. Certain chance meetings, certain inexplicable combinations of events, contain—without any outward appearance of the unusual—a greater amount of the secret quintessence of life than is spread over whole days of ordinary happenings.

Vicky

THE RIVAL PINS

"WHAT BEASTS WOMEN ARE!"

"What do you mean?"

"Well, they have played me a dirty trick."

"You?"

"Yes, me."

"Women, or a woman?"

"Two women."

"Both at the same time?"

"Yes."

"What was it?"

The two young men were sitting in front of a big café on the Boulevard, drinking liqueurs mixed with water, the kind of drink that looks like a medley of water-colour paints.

They were about the same age, twenty-five to thirty. One was fair, the other dark. They had the smartish air of stock-jobbers, of men who frequent the Stock Exchange and the drawing-room, who go everywhere, live everywhere and make love wherever they go. The dark one said:

"I have told you about my intimacy, haven't I, with the little bourgeoisie I met on the beach at Dieppe?"

"Yes."

"Well, you know what it is. I had a mistress in Paris whom I love deeply, an old friend, a good friend: in fact, a habit to which I am attached."

"To the habit?"

"Yes, to the habit, and to her, I don't want to give her up either. She is married to a nice chap, of whom also I am very fond; he is a genial fellow, a real friend. In short, my life is centred in their home."

"Well then?"

"Well! as they could not leave Paris I was a widower at Dieppe."

"Why did you go to Dieppe?"

"For change of air. You can't spend all your life on the boulevards."

"Well?"

"Then I met the little woman I have already mentioned, on the beach."

"The civil servant's wife?"

"Yes, she was awfully bored. Her husband only came down on Sundays, and he is horrible. I understand her perfectly. So we laughed and danced together."

"And the rest?"

"Yes, later on. Well, we met and we liked each other. When I told her I liked her she made me say it again so as to be quite sure, and she put no obstacles in my way."

"Did you love her?"

"Yes, a little; she is very nice."

"And the other one?"

"She was in Paris! Well, for six weeks all went very well and we came back here the best of friends. Do you know how to break with a woman when there is not a single thing against her so far as you are concerned?"

"Yes, certainly."

"How do you manage it?"

"I give her up."

"But how do you set about it?"

"I don't go to see her."

"But what if she comes to see you?"

"I . . . I am not at home."

"And if she comes back?"

"I say I am ill."

"And if she looks after you?"

"Then I play her a dirty trick."

"And if she puts up with it?"

"I write anonymous letters to her husband telling him to look after her the days that I expect her."

"That's serious! Now, I have no power of resistance. I cannot break with women, I collect them. Some I only see once a year, others every ten months, others on quarter-day, others when they want to dine out. Those who have their settled days are no bother, but I often have difficulty in placing new ones."

"Well, then. . . ."

"Then, old chap, the little civil servant was all in a blaze, nothing to blame her about, as I have already said! As her husband spent the whole day at the office she had nothing better to do than to come unexpectedly to see me. Twice she just missed my 'habit.'"

"The devil!"

"Yes. So I gave each one her day, to avoid confusion. Mondays and Saturdays to my 'habit,' Tuesday, Thursday and Sunday to the new one."

"Why this favouritism?"

"Well, old chap, she is the younger."

"That only gave you two rest-days in the week."

"That was enough."

"My congratulations!"

"But, just fancy, the most ridiculous and aggravating thing in the world happened. For four months everything worked perfectly: I slept on both pillows and was really happy, when suddenly, one Monday, the crash came."

"Smoking a good cigar, I was expecting my 'habit' at the usual time, a quarter past one. I was day-dreaming, very pleased with myself, when I noticed that it was past the time. I was surprised, because she is very punctual, but I thought there had been some accidental delay. However, half an hour went by, then an hour, an hour and a half, and I was sure something had detained her, a headache perhaps, or an un-

expected visitor. This waiting about is very trying . . . quite pointless, very annoying and enervating. At last I resigned myself to the inevitable and, not knowing what to do, went to see her.

"I found her reading a novel.

" 'Well,' I said.

" 'I could not come, dear, I was prevented,' she said tranquilly.

" 'What prevented you ?'

" 'Oh . . . other things.'

" 'But . . . what other things ?'

" 'A tiresome visitor.'

"I thought she did not want to tell me the real reason and as she was quite calm about it I did not feel any uneasiness. I reckoned on making up for lost time, the next day, with the other one.

"So on Tuesday I was very . . . very excited, feeling very much in love in expectation of the lady's visit, and even surprised that she did not come before her regular hour : I looked at the clock all the time, watching the hands impatiently. The quarter passed, then the half-hour, then two o'clock . . . I could bear it no longer and strode up and down my room, gluing my forehead to the window, and my ear to the door to listen whether she was coming up the stairs.

"Half-past two, three o'clock ! I put on my hat and rushed to see her. She was reading a novel, my dear fellow !

" 'Well,' I said anxiously.

"She replied as calmly as usual :

" 'I could not come, dear, I was prevented.'

" 'What prevented you ?'

" 'Oh . . . other things.'

" 'But . . . what other things ?'

" 'A tiresome visitor.'

"Of course I immediately thought that she knew everything ; but she seemed so placid, so peaceful, that I set aside

my suspicions in favour of some strange coincidence, unable to believe in such hypocrisy. After an hour of friendly conversation, interrupted at least a dozen times by her little girl's appearance, I went away thoroughly annoyed. Just imagine, the next day. . . ."

"The same thing happened?"

"Yes . . . and the next day, too. This lasted for three weeks without any explanation, without anything to enlighten me as to this strange behaviour, of which, however, I suspected the secret."

"They both knew?"

"Of course. But how? Ah! I was worried enough before I found out."

"How did you find out at last?"

"From their letters. On the same day, in the same words, they gave me my dismissal."

"Well?"

"Well, this is what happened. You know that women have always a large collection of pins about them. Hairpins I know all about, I distrust them and look out for them, but the other pins are much more treacherous, those confounded little black-headed pins that all look alike to us, fools that we are, but which they can recognise as we can tell a horse from a dog."

"Well, evidently one day my little civil servant had left one of these tell-tale things stuck in the hangings near my looking-glass."

"My 'habit' had immediately seen the little black head, no bigger than a pea, in the hanging, and without saying a word had taken it out and stuck one of her own pins, black too, but a different shape, in the same spot."

"The next day the civil servant wished to recover her property, and immediately recognised the exchange that had been made. Then her suspicions were roused and she stuck two, cross-wise. My 'habit' replied to this telegraphic signal by three black heads, one above the other."

"Once they had begun this game, they went on without

saying a word to each other, simply keeping watch. Then, apparently, the 'habit,' being more daring, rolled a thin piece of paper round the pin, on which was written: 'C.D., Post Office, Boulevard Malesherbes.'

"Then they wrote to each other and I was done for. You can understand that it was not all easy going between them. They set about it with a thousand precautions and ruses, with all the care requisite in such cases. Then my 'habit' did a bold thing and made an appointment with the other one. I don't know what they said to each other! All I know is that I supplied the entertainment! That's that!"

"Is that all?"

"Yes."

"You never see them now?"

"Oh, yes. I see them as friends, we have not broken off altogether."

"And they, have they met again?"

"Yes, my dear chap, they have become intimate friends."

"Well, well. And has that not given you an idea?"

"No, what?"

"You silly fool, the idea of sticking back safety-pins."

DUCHOUX

WHILE DESCENDING THE MAIN STAIRCASE OF THE CLUB, WHICH was heated to such an extent that it felt like a hot-house, Baron Mordiane left his fur-lined overcoat open ; but when the front door had closed after him, the intense cold suddenly pierced him to the marrow, making him feel thoroughly miserable. Besides that, he had been losing money, and for some time had suffered from indigestion, and could no longer eat what he fancied.

He was about to return home, when the thought of his great, bare room, his footman sleeping in the anteroom, the water singing on the gas-stove in his dressing-room, and the enormous bed, as old and gloomy as a death-bed, suddenly struck him with a chill even more acute than that of the frosty air.

For some years he had felt weighing on him the burden of loneliness which sometimes overwhelms old bachelors. He had been strong, active and cheerful, spending his days in sport, and his evenings in amusement. Now he was growing dull, and no longer took interest in anything. Exercise tired him, suppers and even dinners made him ill, while women bored him as much as they had once amused him.

The monotony of unvarying evenings, of the same friends met in the same place—at the club—the same card parties with their run of good and bad luck evenly balanced, the same conversation on the same topics, the same wit from the same tongues, the same jokes on the same subjects, the same scandal about the same women, all sickened him so much that there were times when he thought seriously of suicide. He could no longer face this regular, aimless and commonplace life, both

frivolous and dull, and, without knowing why, he longed for peace, rest and comfort.

He did not indeed think of marrying, for he lacked the courage to face a life of depression, conjugal slavery, and that hateful coexistence of two human beings who know each other so well that every word uttered by one is anticipated by the other, and every thought, wish or opinion is immediately divined. He considered that a woman was only worth attention so long as one knew very little about her, while she was still mysterious and unfathomed, vague and perplexing. Therefore what he wanted was family life without the tyranny of family ties, in which he need spend only part of his time ; and again, he was haunted by the memory of his son.

For the last year he had thought of him continuously, and felt an ever-increasing, tormenting longing to see him and make his acquaintance. The affair had taken place while he was a young man, in an atmosphere of romance and affection. The child was sent to the South of France, and brought up near Marseilles, without knowing his father's name. His father had paid for his upbringing, in his infancy, in his school-days and in the activities that followed, ending up with a substantial settlement on a suitable marriage. A trustworthy lawyer had acted as intermediary without giving away the secret.

Baron Mordiane, then, knew only that a child of his was living somewhere near Marseilles, that he had a reputation for being intelligent and well educated, and that he had married the daughter of an architect and surveyor, whom he had succeeded in the business. He was also said to be making money.

Why should he not go and see this unknown son, without disclosing his identity, to study him at first hand and see whether, in case of need, he might find a welcome refuge in his home ?

He had always treated him liberally, and had made a generous settlement, which had been gratefully received. He was there-

fore sure of not coming into conflict with an unreasonable pride, and the idea of leaving for the South had now become an oft-recurring desire which gave him no rest. He was also urged by a curious feeling of self-pity, at the thought of that cheerful and comfortable home on the coast where he would find his charming young daughter-in-law, his grandchildren ready to welcome him, and his son ; all this would remind him of that brief and happy love-affair so many years ago. His only regret was his past generosity, which had assisted the young man on the road to prosperity, and would prevent him from appearing amongst them as a benefactor.

With these thoughts running through his mind he walked along, his head buried deep in his fur collar : his decision was quickly made. Hailing a passing cab, he drove home, and said to his valet, aroused from his sleep to open the door :

" Louis, we are leaving for Marseilles to-morrow evening. We shall be there perhaps a fortnight. Make all preparations for the journey."

The train sped along the sandy banks of the Rhone, over yellow plains and through sunny villages—a country with gaunt encircling mountains in the distance.

Baron Mordiane, awakened after a night in the sleeping-car, gloomily contemplated his reflection in the little mirror in his dressing-case. The crude light of the South showed up wrinkles he had never seen before, and revealed a state of decrepitude that had passed unnoticed in the shaded light of Parisian flats. Looking at the corners of his eyes, the wrinkled eyelids, bald temples and forehead, he said to himself :

" Good heavens, I am worse than faded : I look worn out ! "

His desire for peace suddenly increased, and for the first time in his life, he was conscious of a vague longing to take his grandchildren on his knee.

He hired a carriage in Marseilles and about one o'clock in the afternoon he stopped before a dazzling white country-house typical of the South of France, standing at the end of

an avenue of plane-trees. He beamed with pleasure as he went along the avenue and said to himself :

"It's damned nice."

Suddenly a youngster of about five or six rushed from behind the shrubs and stood motionless at the end of the drive, gazing round-eyed at the visitor.

Mordiane approached and said to him :

"Good afternoon, my boy !"

The youngster made no reply.

The baron then stooped and picked him up to kiss him, but so strong was the odour of garlic coming from the child that he quickly put him down again, murmuring : "Oh ! he must be the gardener's son." And he went on towards the house.

On a line in front of the door, the washing was drying, shirts, napkins, towels, aprons and sheets, while a display of socks hanging in rows on strings one above another filled the whole of a window, like the tiers of sausages in front of a pork-butcher's shop.

The baron called out, and a servant appeared, truly Southern in her dirty and unkempt state, with wisps of hair straggling across her face. Her well-stained skirt still retained some of its original gaudiness, suggesting a country fair or a mountebank's costume.

"Is M. Duchoux at home ?" he inquired.

In giving this name to the unwanted child many years ago, he had indulged his sense of humour at its expense.

"You want M. Duchoux ?" the servant repeated.

"Yes."

"He is in the parlour, drawing plans."

"Tell him that M. Merlin wishes to see him."

She replied in surprise : "Oh ! come in, if you want him," and shouted :

"M. Duchoux, a visitor to see you !"

The baron entered a large room darkened by half-closed shutters, and received a vague impression of dirt and disorder.

A short, bald-headed man, standing at an over-crowded table, was tracing lines on a large sheet of paper. He stopped his work and came forward.

His open waistcoat, slackened trousers and rolled-up shirt-sleeves showed how hot it was, and the muddy shoes that he was wearing pointed to recent rain.

"To whom have I the honour? . . ." he asked, with a strong Southern accent.

"I am M. Merlin. I have come to consult you about some building land."

"Ah! yes. Certainly."

And turning towards his wife, who was knitting in the darkened room, Duchoux said:

"Clear one of the chairs, Josephine."

Mordiane saw a young woman, already showing signs of age, as provincial women of twenty-five do, for want of attention and regular cleanliness, in fact, of all those precautions which form part of a woman's toilet, helping to preserve her youthful appearance, her charm and beauty up to the age of fifty. A kerchief hung over her shoulders, and her hair, which was beautifully thick and black, but was twisted up in a slipshod fashion, looked as though it was seldom brushed. With her roughened hands she removed a child's dress, a knife, a piece of string, an empty flower-pot and a greasy plate from a chair, and offered it to the visitor.

He sat down, and then noticed that on the table at which Duchoux had been working, in addition to his books and papers, there were two freshly-cut lettuces, a basin, a hair-brush, a napkin, a revolver, and several dirty cups.

The architect saw him glance at these, and smilingly remarked: "I am sorry that the room is rather untidy; that is the children's fault," and he drew up his chair to talk to his client.

"You are looking for a piece of land round Marseilles?"

Although he was some distance away, the baron smelt the

odour of garlic which people of the South exhale as flowers do their perfume.

"Was that your son I met under the plane-trees?" Mordiane inquired.

"Yes, the second."

"You have two sons, then?"

"Three, sir, one a year," replied Duchoux, evidently full of pride.

The baron thought that if they all had the same perfume, their nursery must be like a real conservatory. He resumed:

"Yes, I should like a nice piece of ground near the sea, on a secluded beach. . . ."

Then Duchoux began to explain. He had ten, twenty, fifty, a hundred and more plots of land of that kind, at all prices and to suit all tastes. The words came in a torrent as he smiled and wagged his round, bald head in his satisfaction.

And the baron remembered a little woman, slight, fair, and rather sad, who used to say with such yearning: "My own beloved," that the memory alone made his blood run hot in his veins. She had loved him passionately, madly, for three months; then becoming pregnant in the absence of her husband, who was Governor of a colony, she had fled into hiding, distracted by fear and despair, until the birth of the child whom Mordiane carried off one summer evening and whom they had never seen again.

She died of consumption three years later, in the colony where she had gone to rejoin her husband. It was their son who sat beside him now, who was saying with a metallic ring in his voice:

"As for this plot, sir, it is a unique opportunity. . . ."

And Mordiane remembered the other voice, light as a zephyr, murmuring:

"My own beloved; we will never part. . . ." The memory of the gentle, blue, devoted look in those eyes came back to

him as he watched the round eyes, also blue, but so vacant, of this ridiculous little man who was so like his mother, and yet. . . .

Yes, he looked more and more like her every minute; his intonation, his demeanour, his actions were the same; he resembled her as a monkey resembles a man; yet he was of her blood, he had many of her little habits, though distorted, irritating and revolting. The baron was in torment, haunted suddenly by that terrible, ever-growing resemblance, which enraged, maddened and tortured him like a nightmare, or like bitter remorse.

"When can we look at this land together?" he stammered.

"Why, to-morrow, if you like."

"Yes, to-morrow. What time?"

"At one o'clock."

"All right."

The child he had met in the avenue appeared in the door and cried:

"Father!"

No one answered him.

Mordiane stood up trembling with an intense longing to escape. That word "father" had struck him like a bullet. That garlicky "father," that Southern "father," was addressed to him, was meant for him. Oh! how good had been the perfume of his sweetheart of bygone days!

As Duchoux was showing him out, the baron said:

"Is this house yours?"

"Yes, sir, I bought it recently, and I am proud of it. I am fortune's child, sir, and I make no secret of it; I am proud of it. I owe nothing to anyone; I am the child of my own efforts, and I owe everything to myself."

The child, who had stayed on the door-step, again cried: "Father!" the voice coming from a greater distance.

Mordiane, shivering with fear, seized with panic, fled as one does from a great danger. "He will guess who I am," he

thought to himself, "he will hug me in his arms and call me 'Father' and give me a kiss reeking of garlic."

"I shall see you to-morrow, sir."

"To-morrow, at one o'clock."

.

The carriage rumbled along the white road.

"Driver, take me to the station," he shouted, while two voices seemed to ring in his ears. One of them, far away and sweet, the faint, sad voice of the dead, was saying: "My own beloved"; the other, a metallic, shrill, repellent voice, crying: "Father!" much as one shouts: "Stop him!" when a thief is in flight.

As he came into the club next evening, Count d'Etreillis said to him:

"We have not seen you for three days. Have you been ill?"

"Yes, I have not been very well. I suffer from headaches occasionally. . ."

THE RENDEZVOUS

SHE HAD ON HER HAT AND COAT, WITH A BLACK VEIL DOWN TO her nose and another in her pocket to put over the first as soon as she got into the guilty four-wheeler. She was tapping her boot with the point of her umbrella and remained seated in her room, uncertain whether to go out to her rendezvous.

And yet how many times within the last two years had she got ready to join her lover, the handsome Viscount de Martelet, in his chambers, when she knew that her husband—a society stockbroker—would be at the Exchange!

The clock behind her loudly ticked out the seconds; a half-read book lay open on the little rosewood writing-table between the windows, and a strong scent of violets from two small bunches floating in a couple of tiny Dresden vases on the mantelpiece, mingled with a faint odour of verbena wafted through the half-open door of the dressing-room.

The sound of the clock striking three made her jump up. She turned to look at the time, then smiled, thinking: "He is waiting for me, he will be getting angry." Then she left the room, told the footman that she would be back in an hour at the latest—a lie—went downstairs, and set out on foot.

It was the end of May, that delightful season when spring, on its way from the country, lays siege to Paris, seeming to carry all before it, bursting through brick walls into the home, making the city blossom forth, shedding gaiety over its buildings, over the asphalt of its pavements and the stones of its streets, drenching it in merriment, and making it drunk with vigour like a forest bursting forth into leaf.

Madame Hoggan took a few steps to the right, intending, as usual, to go along the Rue de Provence where she could hail

a four-wheeler, but the delightful feeling of summer suddenly took possession of her, and changing her mind, she turned down the Rue de la Chaussée d'Antin, not knowing why, but vaguely attracted by a wish to see the trees in the square of the Trinité.

"He can wait ten minutes longer," she said to herself. The idea of keeping him waiting pleased her and as she walked through the crowd she fancied she saw him getting impatient, looking at the clock, opening the window, listening at the door, sitting down and getting up again, not daring to smoke—as she had forbidden smoking on the days they met—and casting desperate glances at his box of cigarettes.

She walked along slowly, her mind adrift among the many things around her—the people, the shops—and she slackened her pace more and more; so little did she care about reaching the flat that she used every shop-window as an excuse for loitering.

At the end of the street, in front of the church, the green of the small square attracted her, and she crossed the Place and went into the garden, that children's playground, and strolled twice round the narrow patch of grass, mingling with the nurses, gorgeous in their bright-coloured cloaks and caps trimmed with ribbons and flowers. Then she took a chair, sat down, and raising her eyes to the clock, that looked like a moon in the steeple, she watched the hands move round.

The half-hour struck, and her heart beat with pleasure when she heard the chimes. She had already stolen thirty minutes, it would take another fifteen to reach the Rue Miromesnil, those and a few more minutes in which to loiter about would make an hour! One whole hour stolen from the rendezvous! She would stay barely forty minutes, and again the whole thing would be over.

Goodness! how it bored her to go! Going to the dentist's was bad enough! She suffered from the intolerable memory of these appointments—on an average, one a week for the last

two years—and the thought that there would be another one presently filled her with anguish. Not that it was as painful as a visit to the dentist's, but it was such a bore, so complicated, so long, so unpleasant, that anything, anything, even an operation, seemed preferable. Nevertheless she went on, very slowly, stopping, sitting down, hanging about, but she went all the same. Oh! how she would have liked to miss the appointment, but she played that trick on the poor Viscount twice running last month, and she dared not do it again so soon. Why did she go back? Ah! why? Because it had become a habit, and she had no good reason to give poor Martelet when he wanted to know *the why!* Why had she started the affair? Why? She no longer knew! Had she been in love with him? Possibly! Not very much, just a little, ever so long ago! He was very nice, fastidious, distinguished, gallant, and you could see at the very first glance that he was the perfect lover for a woman of the world. The courtship had lasted three months—the normal period for an honourable struggle and just sufficient resistance—then she had consented, but with what flutterings, what timidity, what awful yet exquisite shrinkings at that first meeting, followed by all the others, in the little bachelor flat in the Rue Miromesnil. Her heart? What did she feel when, tempted, vanquished, conquered, she entered the door of that house of nightmares for the first time? She really did not know! She had forgotten! An act, a date, a thing, may be remembered, but it is rare to remember a fleeting emotion two years afterwards; it is too fragile for memory. Oh! She had not forgotten the others, the rosary of meetings, the stations of the cross of love, those stations that were so fatiguing, so monotonous, so alike, that she was filled with nausea at the thought of what was going to happen presently.

Goodness! think of all the four-wheelers that had been hired to go there, they were not like ordinary four-wheelers. The drivers must have guessed the truth. She felt that by the

way they looked at her, and the eyes of the Parisian cabmen are terrible! When you remember that in court they always recognise criminals whom they have only driven once in the dead of night, from some street to the station, years before, and that they have about as many fares as there are hours in a day, that their memory is so good that they say at once: "This is the man I picked up in the Rue des Martyrs and put down at the Lyons station at 12.45 A.M. on July 10th last year!" It is enough to make you shiver with apprehension when you are risking all a woman risks in going to a rendezvous, placing her reputation in the keeping of the first cabman she meets! The last two years she had engaged at least a hundred or a hundred and twenty for the journey to the Rue Miromesnil, counting one a week. These were all witnesses who might appear against her at a critical moment.

As soon as she was in the cab she drew the other veil—as thick and as black as a mask—from her pocket and fastened it over her eyes. It hid her face, true enough, but what about the rest, her dress, hat, parasol? would they not be noticed, had they not been seen already? Oh! what torture she endured in the Rue Miromesnil! She thought she recognised all the passers-by, all the servants, everybody. Almost before the cab stopped she jumped out and ran past the porter, who was always standing outside his lodge. Now, he must know everything, everything—her address, her name, her husband's profession, everything, for the concierges are the most artful of all the police. For two years she had wanted to bribe him, to throw him a hundred-franc note as she passed. She had never dared to throw the piece of paper at him! She was afraid. Of what?—she did not know! Of being called back if he did not understand? Of a scandal? Perhaps of being arrested? The Viscount's flat was only half-way up the first flight of stairs, but it seemed as high up as the top of the Tower of St. Jacques to her. As soon as she reached the entrance of the building, she felt she was caught in a trap and the slightest noise in

front or behind made her feel faint. She could not go back again with the concierge and the road blocking her retreat, and if anyone was coming downstairs she dared not ring Martelet's bell, but passed the door as if she were going somewhere else. She went up, up, up! She would have climbed up forty stories! Then when all seemed quiet she would run down, terrified lest she should make a mistake in the flat!

He was there, waiting, dressed in a velvet suit lined with silk, very smart but rather ridiculous, and for two years he had never varied the way he received her, never made the slightest change, not in a single gesture!

As soon as he had shut the door he would say: "Allow me to kiss your hands, my dear, dear friend!" Then he followed her into the room where the shutters were closed and lights lit both winter and summer, because this was the fashion, and knelt down gazing at her from head to foot with an air of adoration. The first time it had been very nice, very successful! Now she felt that she was looking at M. Delaunay playing the fifth act of a popular piece for the hundred-and-twentieth time. He really ought to make some change.

And then after, oh! God! after! that was the worst to bear! No, he never made any change, poor chap! A good chap, but so ordinary! . . .

How difficult it was to undress without a maid! For once it did not matter much, but repeated every week it became a nuisance! No, indeed, a man should not exact such a task from a woman! But if it was difficult to undress, to dress again was almost an impossibility, your nerves made you want to shriek, and you felt so exasperated that you could have boxed the young man's ears when he said, walking awkwardly around: "Shall I help you?"—Help her! Yes, indeed, how? What could he do? You only had to see him hold a pin to know he was no use.

That was probably the moment she had begun to take a

dislike to him. When he said : " Shall I help you ? " she could have killed him. Besides, a woman must end by hating a man who for two years has forced her to put on her clothes a hundred and twenty times without a maid.

It is true that not many men were as awkward as he was, so clumsy, so monotonous. The little Baron de Grimal would never have said in such a silly way : " Shall I help you ? " He would have helped, he was so lively, so amusing, so witty. Well ! He was a diplomatist ; he had travelled in every country, wandered about all over, he had certainly dressed and undressed women clad according to every fashion in the world, he must have done so ! . . .

The church clock chimed the three-quarters. She drew herself up, looked at the time and began to laugh, saying to herself : " How excited he must be ! " Then she left the Square, walking briskly, but had only just reached the Place outside when she met a man who bowed and raised his hat.

" Dear me, you, Baron ? " she said, surprised, for she had just been thinking about him.

" Yes, Madame."

He asked how she was, then, after a few vague remarks, said :

" Do you know you are the only one—you will allow me to say, of my lady friends, won't you ?—who has not yet been to see my Japanese collection ? "

" But, my dear Baron, a woman cannot visit a bachelor ? "

" What ! What ! That's quite wrong when it is a question of going to see a collection of rare curios ! "

" At all events, she cannot go alone."

" And why not ? I have had any number of lady visitors alone, just to see my collection. They come every day. Shall tell you their names ?—no, I won't do that. One must be discreet, even when quite innocent. In principle there is nothing wrong in going to see a man who is a gentleman,

well known, and of good birth, unless one goes for some doubtful reason."

"Well, on the whole, you are right."

"Then you will come to see my collection."

"When?"

"Now."

"Impossible, I am in a hurry."

"Nonsense. You have been sitting in the Square this last half-hour."

"You were watching me?"

"I was looking at you."

"Really, I am in a hurry."

"I am sure you're not. Admit that you're not."

Madame Hoggan began to laugh, saying: "No . . . no . . . not in a great. . . ."

A cab passed close by which the Baron stopped and opening the door, said: "Get in, Madame."

"But, Baron, it's impossible, I can't come to-day."

"You are very imprudent, Madame. Do get in! People are beginning to stare at us, soon there will be a crowd: they will think I am running away with you and we shall both be arrested: do get in, I beg you!"

She got in, scared and dazed. Then he sat beside her and said to the cabman: "Rue de Provence."

Suddenly she exclaimed: "Oh! dear, dear. I have forgotten an urgent telegram, will you take me to the nearest post office first?"

The cab stopped a little further on in the Rue de Châteaudun, and she said to the Baron: "Do get me a fifty-centimes telegraph-card.¹ I promised my husband I would invite Martelet to dinner to-morrow, and had quite forgotten about it."

When the Baron came back with the blue card, she wrote in pencil:

¹ Like blue letter-cards but used as telegrams, they are sent through special tubes.

"DEAR FRIEND,—

"I am not well. A bad attack of neuralgia is keeping me in bed. Impossible to go out. Come and dine to-morrow evening so that I may be forgiven.

"JEANNE."

She moistened the gum, closed the telegram-card carefully and addressed it : "Viscount de Martelet, 240 Rue Miromesnil," then returning the card to the Baron, said :

"Now, will you be good enough to drop this in the special box for telegrams ?"

Daily

IN PORT

I

HAVING LEFT HAVRE ON MAY 3, 1882, FOR A VOYAGE IN Chinese waters, the three-masted sailing-ship *Notre-Dame-des-Vents* re-entered Marseilles harbour on August 8, 1886, after a four years' voyage. She had discharged her original cargo in the Chinese port to which she had been chartered, had there picked up a new freight for Buenos Ayres, and thence had shipped cargo for Brazil.

Various other voyages, not to speak of damages, repairs, several months spent becalmed, storms that blew her out of her course, and all the accidents, adventures and misadventures of the sea, had detained far from her land this three-masted Norman boat now returned to Marseilles with a hold full of tin boxes containing American preserved foods.

At the beginning of the voyage she had on board, besides the captain and the mate, fourteen sailors, eight Normans and six Bretons. At the end only five Bretons and four Normans remained; the Breton had died at sea; the four Normans, who had disappeared in various circumstances, had been replaced by two Americans, a Negro and a Norwegian shanghaied one evening in a Singapore den.

The great ship, sails furled, yards forming a cross with the mast, drawn by a Marseilles tug that panted along before her, rolled in a slight swell that died gently away in the calm waters behind her; she passed in front of the Château d'If, then under all the grey rocks of the roadstead over which the setting sun flung a reek of gold, and entered the old harbour where, side by side alongside the quays, were gathered ships from all

corners of the globe, huddled together, large and small, of all shapes and riggings, like a fish-soup of boats in this too confined basin, full of foul water, where the hulls grazed and rubbed against each other, for all the world as if they were pickled in salt-water liquor.

Notre-Dame-des-Vents took her place between an Italian brig and an English schooner, which drew apart to make way for their comrade; then, when all the formalities of customs and harbour had been complied with, the captain gave two-thirds of his crew shore leave for the evening.

It was night. The lights of Marseilles were lit. In the warmth of the summer evening, an odour of garlic-flavoured cooking hung over the noisy city, alive with the sound of voices, rumblings, clatterings, all the gaiety of the South.

As soon as they felt land under them, the ten men who had been tossed for months on the sea, began to walk very carefully, with hesitating steps, like creatures strayed out of their element, unaccustomed to cities, two by two in a procession.

They rolled along, taking their bearings, following the scent down the by-streets that opened on to the harbour, their blood on fire with a hunger for love that had grown stronger and stronger in their bodies throughout their last sixty-six days at sea. The Normans marched ahead, led by Célestin Duclos, a tall, shrewd, sturdy young fellow, who captained the others whenever they set foot on shore. He found out the best places, devised ways and means to his liking, and refrained from risking himself too readily in the brawls so common between sailors on shore. But when he did get involved in one, he was absolutely fearless.

After hesitating some little time between the obscure streets that ran down to the sea like sewers, from which rose a heavy smell, as it were the very breath of hovels, Célestin decided on a sort of winding passage where lighted lamps, bearing enormous numbers on their frosted coloured glass, were hung out above the doors. Under the narrow arch of the doorways,

women in aprons, looking like servant-girls, and seated on rush-bottomed chairs, got up at their approach, made three steps to the edge of the stream that ran down the middle of the street and stood right across the path of the line of men that advanced slowly, singing and chuckling, excited already by the neighbourhood of these prostitutes' cells.

Sometimes in the depths of a lobby a second door padded with brown leather opened abruptly, and behind it appeared a stout, half-naked woman, whose heavy thighs and plump arms were sharply outlined under a coarse, tight-fitting shift of white cotton. Her short petticoat looked like a hooped girdle, and the soft flesh of her bosom, arms and shoulders made a rosy patch against a bodice of black velvet edged with gold lace. She called to them from far off: "Are you coming in, dearies?" and sometimes came out herself to clutch one of them, pulling him towards her doorway with all her might, clinging to him like a spider dragging in a body bigger than itself. The man, excited by her touch, resisted feebly, and the others halted to watch him, hesitating between their desire to go in without further delay and their desire to make this appetising stroll last a little longer. Then, when after the most exhausting effort the woman had dragged the sailor to the threshold of her abode, into which the whole company were about to plunge after him, Célestin Duclos, who was a judge of such houses, would suddenly cry: "Don't go in there, Marchand, it's not the right one."

Whereupon, obedient to this command, the man disengaged himself with brutal violence, and the friends fell again into line, pursued by the obscene abuse of the exasperated woman, while other women, all the way down the passage ahead of them, came out of their doors, attracted by the noise, and poured out hoarse-voiced, enticing appeals. They went on their way, growing more and more excited, between the cajoling cries and seductive charms offered by the chorus of love's doorkeepers down the length of the street before them, and the vile curses

flung after them by the chorus behind, of despised and disappointed women. Now and then they met other companies of men, soldiers marching along with swords clattering against their legs, more sailors, a solitary citizen or so, a few shop assistants. Everywhere opened other narrow streets, starred with evil beacon-lights. They walked steadily through this labyrinth of hovels on the greasy cobbled streets, oozing streams of foul water, between houses full of women's flesh.

At last Duclos made up his mind and, halting in front of a fairly decent-looking house, marshalled his company into it.

II

The entertainment lacked nothing! For four hours the ten sailors took their fill of love and wine. Six months' pay vanished on it.

They were installed, lords of all they surveyed, in the big saloon, regarding with unfriendly eyes the ordinary clients who installed themselves at little tables in corners, where one of the women who were still disengaged, dressed like overgrown babies or music-hall singers, ran to attend on them, and then sat down beside them.

Each man had on arrival selected his companion, whom he retained throughout the evening, for the lower orders are not promiscuous. Three tables had been dragged together, and after the first round of drinks, the procession, fallen into two ranks and increased by as many women as there were sailors, re-formed on the staircase. The noise made by the four feet of each couple was heard for some time on the wooden steps, while this long file of lovers plunged through the narrow door that led to the bedrooms.

Then they came down again for more drinks; went up again, came down again.

Now, very nearly drunk, they began to bawl. Each man,

with reddened eyes, his fancy on his knee, sang or shouted, hammering on the table with doubled fists, rolled the wine round his throat, giving full play to the beast in man. In the midst of them, Célestin Duclos, holding to him a tall red-cheeked wench, seated astride on his knee, regarded her ardently. Not so drunk as the others—not that he had drunk any less—he could still think of more than the one thing, and more human than the rest, he tried to talk to her. His thoughts were a little elusive, slipping from his grasp, returning and disappearing before he could remember just what he had wanted to say.

He laughed, repeating :

“Then, then . . . you’ve been here a long time.”

“Six months,” replied the girl.

He appeared pleased with her, as if that were a proof of good conduct, and went on :

“Do you like this life ? ”

She hesitated, then spoke resignedly :

“One gets through with it. It’s no worse than anything else. Being a servant or walking the streets, they’re both dirty jobs.”

He seemed to approve this truth too.

“You’re not from these parts ? ” said he.

She shook her head without speaking.

“Do you come from far ? ”

She nodded, still silent.

“Where from ? ”

She seemed to search her mind, trying to collect her memories, then she murmured :

“From Perpignan.”

Again he showed great satisfaction, and said :

“Oh, yes.”

In her turn she asked him :

“You’re a sailor, aren’t you ? ”

“Yes, my sweet.”

"Have you come a long way?"

"Oh, yes! I've seen countries, ports, and all that."

"I suppose you sailed round the world?"

"I dare say, more like twice than once."

Again she seemed to hesitate, searching in her mind for something forgotten, then, in a rather altered, grave voice, she said:

"You have come across a good many ships in your voyages?"

"I have that, my sweet."

"Perhaps you've even come across *Notre-Dame-des-Vents*?"

He chuckled.

"No later than a week ago."

She turned pale, all the blood ebbing from her cheeks, and asked:

"Is that true, really true?"

"As true as I'm telling you."

"You're not telling me a lie?"

He lifted his hand.

"God's truth I'm not," said he.

"Then do you know whether Célestin Duclos is still with her?"

He was surprised, uneasy, and wanted to know more before replying.

"Do you know him?"

She became suspicious too.

"No, not me, it's some woman who knows him."

"One of the women here?"

"No, outside."

"In the street?"

"No, another."

"What woman?"

"Oh, just a woman, a woman like me."

"What's this woman want with him?"

"How should I know, what d'you think?"

They stared into each other's eyes, trying to read the thoughts

behind, guessing that something serious was going to come of this.

He went on :

" Can I see this woman ? "

" What would you say to her ? "

" I'd say . . . I'd say . . . that I have seen Célestin Duclos."

" Is he all right ? "

" As right as you or me, he's a lad."

She was silent again, collecting her thoughts, then, very slowly, asked :

" Where was she bound for, the *Notre-Dame-des-Vents* ? "

" Well, to Marseilles."

She could not repress a start.

" Really ? "

" Yes, really."

" Do you know Duclos ? "

" Yes. I know him."

She hesitated again, then said softly :

" Good. That's good."

" What d'you want with him ? "

" Listen, you can tell him . . . nothing ! "

He continued to stare at her, more and more uneasy. He must know the whole now.

" Do you know him then ? "

" No," said she.

" Then what d'you want with him ? "

She came to a sudden decision, got up, ran to the bar where the proprietress sat enthroned, seized a lemon, cut it open, pouring the juice into a glass, then filled up the glass with plain water and, bringing it to him, said :

" Drink this."

" Why ? "

" To sober you up. After that I'll talk to you."

He drank obediently, wiped his lips with the back of his hand, and declared :

"That's all right, I'm listening to you."

"You must promise me not to tell him that you have seen me, nor who told you what I am just going to tell you. Swear it."

He lifted his hand, with a knowing air.

"I swear it."

"On the good God himself?"

"Yes, on the good God."

"Well, you're to tell him that his father is dead, that his mother is dead, that his brother is dead, all the three of them in the same month, of typhoid fever, in January 1883, three and a half years ago."

And now it was he who felt the blood rush through his body, and for some moments he sat there, so overcome that he could find nothing to say in reply; then he began to have doubts and asked:

"Are you sure?"

"I'm quite sure."

"Who told it to you?"

She put her hands on his shoulders and, peering into his eyes, said:

"You swear you won't give me away?"

"I swear it."

"I'm his sister."

Her name broke involuntarily from his mouth:

"Françoise?"

She regarded him again fixedly, then, overwhelmed by a crazy fear, by a profound feeling of horror, murmured under her breath, against his mouth:

"Oh, oh, is it you, Célestin?"

They sat rigid, eyes staring into eyes.

Round them, the sailors went on shouting. The noise of glasses, fists, and heels beating in tune to the choruses, and the shrill cries of the women, mingled with the uproarious songs.

He felt her against him, held close to him, warm and terrified,

his sister ! Then, in a mere whisper, afraid lest someone overhear him, so low that she herself could hardly hear :

" My God, I've done a fine thing ! "

Her eyes filled with tears in an instant, and she stammered :

" It's not my fault, is it ? "

But he said abruptly :

" So they're dead ? "

" Yes, they're dead. "

" Dad, and mother, and my brother ? "

" All three in the same month, as I've just told you. I was left alone, with nothing but what I stood up in, seeing that I owed money to the chemist and the doctor and for burying the three bodies, which I paid off with the furniture. "

" After that I went as servant to old Cacheux, you know him, the cripple. I was just exactly fifteen then, seeing that you went away when I was not quite fourteen. I got into trouble with him. You're a fool when you're young. Then I went as housemaid to a solicitor ; he seduced me too and set me up in a room in Havre. It wasn't long before he stopped coming ; I spent three days without food and then, since I couldn't get any work, I went into a house, like many another. I've seen the world too, I have, and a dirty world at that ! Rouen, Evreux, Lille, Bordeaux, Perpignan, Nice, and now here I am at Marseilles ! "

Tears poured out of her eyes and her nose, wetting her cheeks, and ran down into her mouth.

She went on :

" I thought you were dead too, my poor Célestin. "

He said :

" I would never have known you again, you were so little then, and now you're so big, but how was it you didn't recognise me ? "

She made a despairing gesture.

" I see so many men that they all look alike to me. "

He was still staring into her eyes in the grip of a confused

emotion, an emotion so overwhelming that he wanted to cry like a beaten child. He still held her in his arms, sitting astride his legs, his hands spread out on the girl's back, and now by dint of staring at her, he recognised her at last, the little sister left in the country with the three she had watched die while he tossed at sea.

All at once he took her new-found face in his great sailor's paws and began to embrace her as a man embraces his flesh and blood. Then sobs, a man's terrible sobs, long-drawn surging cries, rose in his throat like the hiccups of a drunken man.

He stammered :

"To see you, to see you again, Françoise, my little Françoise. . . ."

Suddenly he leaped to his feet and began to swear in a dreadful voice, bringing his fist down on the table with such violence that the overturned glasses broke to atoms. Then he took three steps, staggered, flung out his arms and fell face downwards. He rolled on the floor, shouting, beating the ground with arms and legs, and uttering such groans that they were like the death-rattle of a man in agony.

All the sailors looked at him and laughed.

"He isn't half drunk," said one.

"Put him to bed," said another ; "if he goes out they'll stick him in jail."

Then, as he had money in his pockets, the proprietress offered a bed, and the other sailors, themselves so drunk that they couldn't stand, hoisted him up the narrow staircase to the bedroom of the woman who had lately received him, and who remained sitting on a chair, at the foot of that guilty couch, weeping over him, until morning.

THE DEAD WOMAN

I HAD LOVED HER TO DISTRACTION. WHY DO WE LOVE? IT IS a strange thing to see in the whole world only one being, to have in one's mind only a single thought, a single desire in one's heart, a single name on one's lips: a name rising there continually, rising, as a river rises from its source, from the depths of our soul, so that we murmur it all day long, everywhere, like a prayer.

I will not set out our story. Love has no more than one story, always the same. I had met her and loved her. That tells all. And for a whole year I had lived in her affection, in her arms, in her caresses, in her glance, in her garments, in her words, wrapped round, bound, held fast in all that was part of her, so wholly that I no longer knew whether it was day or night, whether I died or lived, on this old earth or on some other world.

And then she died. How? I don't know, I know nothing now.

She came home wet, one rainy evening, and the next day she was coughing. She coughed for about a week and took to her bed.

What happened? I don't know now.

Doctors came, wrote prescriptions, went away. They brought remedies; a woman gave her them to drink. Her hands were hot, her brow damp and burning, her eyes were brilliant and mournful. I spoke to her, she answered me. What did we say? I don't know now. I have forgotten all, all, all. She died, I remember vividly her little sigh, so weak a little sigh, the last she gave. The nurse said: "Ah." I understood, I understood.

I have understood nothing since. Nothing. I saw a priest who spoke of "your mistress." I felt that he was insulting her. Since she was dead, no one had any right to know that about her. I threw him out. Another came, a very good man, a gentle soul. I wept when he spoke to me about her.

They asked for instructions about a thousand things to do with the burial of her. I don't know now what they were. But I do remember vividly the coffin, the sound made by the blows of the hammer when they nailed her in it. Oh, my God!

She was buried. Buried! She! In that hole! A few people came, friends. I rushed away. I ran. I walked for hours about the streets. Then I went home. The next day I began to travel.

I came back to Paris yesterday.

When I saw my bedroom again, our bedroom, our bed, our furniture, the whole house which still held all those mortal traces that death leaves behind, I was seized by so sharp a return of agony that I had almost opened the window and flung myself into the street. Unable to stay any longer surrounded by these things, between the walls that had held and sheltered her, and must still hide in their imperceptible cracks a thousand atoms of her being, of her flesh and her breath, I seized my hat to rush out. Suddenly, in the very instant of reaching the door, I passed before the large glass in the hall, which she had had placed there so that every day before she went out she could see herself from head to foot, and see whether her toilet had been successful, was just right and charming, from hat to shoes.

I stopped dead in front of this glass which had so many times reflected her, so many times, so many times, that it must then have caught and held the image of her.

I stood there, shuddering, my eyes fixed on the glass, on the smooth depths that were empty now, but had held the whole

of her, possessed her as wholly as I did, as wholly as did my passionate glances. I thought that I loved this glass—I touched it—it was cold! Oh, memory! memory! woeful, searing, living, frightful glass, the cause of all our agonies. Happy the man whose heart, like a glass across whose surface reflections glide and vanish, forgets all that it has held, all that has passed before it, all that is gazed on and mirrored in its emotions of affection and love. How I suffer!

I went out, and by no will of my own, without knowing what I did, without wishing it, I wandered towards the cemetery. I found her simple grave, a marble cross with these few words: "She loved, was loved and died."

She was there, under there, a mass of decay! Horrible! I broke into sobs, lying with my forehead pressed against the earth.

I stayed there long, very long. Then I saw that night was falling. Thereupon a strange wild desire, the desire of a despairing lover, took possession of me. I wanted to spend the night near her, a last night, to weep on her grave. But I should be seen and turned out. What could I do? I was cunning. I got up and began to wander about this city of the lost. I walked and walked. How small a city it is beside the other city, the city of the living! And yet the dead far outnumber the living. We need tall houses, streets, so much space, for the four generations that at one and the same time enjoy the light of day, drink the water of springs, the juice of grapes, and eat the bread of the fields.

And for all the generations of the dead, for all the serried ranks of human beings, from the beginning to our day, suffices a very nothing, a field, almost nothing. The earth receives them, oblivion effaces them. Farewell!

At the end of the cultivated cemetery, I came all at once upon the deserted cemetery, the one where the dead of long ago came at their end to mingle their dust with the earth, where the very crosses were rotting away, where the latest comers

will be placed at some future day. It is full of wild roses, sturdy black cypress-trees, a sad and marvellous garden, grown rich feeding on human flesh.

I was alone, quite alone. I effaced myself behind a green tree. I hid myself entirely among its thick, sombre branches.

And I waited, clinging to its trunk like a shipwrecked man to a spar.

When the night was dark, very dark, I left my refuge and began to walk softly, with slow, muted steps, over this ground full of the dead.

I wandered long, a long, long time. I did not find her again. With outstretched arms, wide-open eyes, striking against tombstones with hands and feet and knees and chest, with my very head, I went and did not find her. I touched, I felt about like a blind man seeking his way, I felt stones, crosses, iron bars, wreaths of glass, wreaths of faded flowers. I read the names with my fingers, tracing them over the letters. What a night ! what a night ! I did not find her.

No moon ! What a night ! I was seized with fear, terrible fear, in these narrow patches, between two rows of graves. Graves ! graves ! graves ! Everywhere graves ! To the left, to the right of me, before me, round me, everywhere, graves ! I sat down on one of them, for my knees were shaking so much that I could not go on walking. I heard the beating of my heart ! And I heard something else too ! What was it ? A confused, nameless sound ! Was the sound in my fear-stricken mind, in the impenetrable night, or under the mysterious earth, under the earth sown with human corpses ? I looked round me.

How long did I stay there ? I don't know. I was paralysed with terror, I was drunk with fear, near screaming, near death.

And all at once I thought that the slab of marble on which I was seated moved. In very truth, it was moving, as if someone were pushing it up. With one bound I flung myself on the nearest grave, and saw, yes, I saw the stone which I had just left, raise itself bolt upright ; and the dead appeared, a

naked skeleton who was pushing off the stone with his bent back. I saw, I saw with perfect clearness, although the night was black as pitch. On the cross I could read :

“ Here lies Jacques Olivant, who departed this life aged fifty-one years. He was a good, honest man, who loved his family, and died in the peace of the Lord.”

Now the dead man himself was reading the words written on his tomb. Then he picked up a stone from the path, a small, sharp stone, and began carefully to scratch out those words. Slowly he obliterated them, gazing with his empty eye-sockets at the place where until that moment they had been engraved ; and with the end of the bone which was once his index finger he wrote in luminous letters, like the lines that are traced on walls with the end of a match :

“ Here lies Jacques Olivant, who departed this life aged fifty-one years. By his harshness he hastened the death of his father, from whom he was anxious to inherit, he tortured his wife, tormented his child, cheated his neighbours, robbed when he could and died a wretched man.”

The dead made an end of writing and, immobile, contemplated his work. And turning round, I saw that all the graves were open, that all the dead bodies had emerged, that all had effaced the lies written by their relatives on the funeral stone, to reaffirm thereon the truth.

And I saw that all had been the executioners of their kith and kin, malignant, dishonest, hypocrites, liars, cheats, slanderers, envious, that they had robbed, deceived, perpetrated every sort of shameful and abominable deed, these good fathers, these faithful spouses, these devoted sons, these chaste maidens, these upright tradesmen, these men and women reputed beyond reproach.

With one accord they were writing, on the threshold of their eternal dwelling, the cruel, terrible, and sacred truth, of which every one in the world is ignorant or pretends to be ignorant.

I thought that *she* too must be tracing it on her grave. And fearless now, running between the yawning graves, between the corpses, between the skeletons, I made my way towards her, sure that I should shortly find her.

I recognised her from afar off, although I could not see the face wrapped in its grave-clothes.

And on the marble cross where just now I had read : " She loved, was loved and died," I saw :

" Going out one day to deceive her lover, she caught cold in the rain, and died."

It appears that they picked me up at dawn, lying unconscious, near a grave.



THE PUTTER-TO-SLEEP

THE SEINE SPREAD BEFORE MY HOUSE WITHOUT A WRINKLE, varnished by the morning sun. It lay there, a lovely, wide, slow, long flood of silver, tarnished in places; and on the further side of the river a line of tall trees stretched along the bank a huge wall of verdure.

The feeling of life which begins again each morning, of life, fresh, gay, loving, shivered in the leaves, fluttered in the air, shimmered in the water.

They brought me the newspapers which the postman had just left and I walked along the river-bank, quietly, reading them.

In the first I opened I caught the words "Suicide Statistics" and I was informed that this year more than eight thousand five hundred persons had killed themselves.

At that moment I saw them! I saw this hideous massacre of desperate creatures, tired of life, I saw men bleeding, their jaws shattered, their skulls smashed, their chests pierced by bullets, slowly dying, alone in a little hotel bedroom, and thinking nothing of their wound, always of their misery.

Others I saw, throat gaping or stomach ripped open, still holding in their hand the kitchen knife or the razor.

I saw others, seated before a glass in which matches were soaking, or before a little bottle with a red label. They would watch it with a fixed, motionless stare; then drink it, then wait; then a grimace would cross their faces, contract their lips; a fear crept into their eyes, for they did not know how much they would suffer before the end.

They would get up, stop, fall, and with hands clutching their stomachs, feel their organs burned and their entrails cor-

roded by the liquid's flames, before their consciousness was overcast.

Others again I saw hanging from a nail in the wall, from the window fastening, from the ceiling bracket, from the beam of a barn, from the branch of a tree, beneath the evening drizzle. And I guessed all that they had done before they hung there, tongue lolling, motionless. I guessed the anguish of their hearts, their last hesitations, their movements in fixing the rope, trying whether it held firmly, passing it about their neck and letting themselves fall.

Others I saw lying on wretched beds, mothers with their little children, old men racked by starvation, girls torn with the agony of love, all rigid, stifled, suffocated, while in the centre of the room still smoked the charcoal brazier.

And some I glimpsed walking to and fro by night on deserted bridges. These were the most sinister. The water eddied beneath the arches with a soft whisper. They did not see it . . . they guessed its presence, scenting its chilly odour ! They desired it and feared it. They dared not. Yet they must. The hour was striking from some distant clock, and suddenly, in the wide silences of the darkness, there swept by me, quickly stifled, the splash of a body falling into the river, a few screams, the slapping of water beaten with hands. Sometimes there was nothing more than the plunge of their fall, when they had bound their arms or tied a stone to their feet.

Oh ! poor folk, poor folk, poor folk, how I felt their anguish, how I died their deaths ! I have passed through all their miseries ; in one hour I have undergone all their tortures. I have known all the sorrows which led them to that place ; for I feel the deceitful degradation of life as none before me ever felt it.

How well I understand them, those feeble creatures, tormented by ill fortune, reft of their loved ones, awakened from their dreams of later reward, from the illusion of another existence, in which God, so pitiless now, would be just at last,

disabused of the mirage of happiness—those who have had enough of life, would end this relentless tragedy, this shameful comedy.

Suicide ; it is the strength of those who have no more strength left, the hope of those who believe no more, the sublime courage of the conquered ! Yes, there is at least one door from this life ; we can always open it and pass to the other side. Nature has made one gesture of pity ; she has not imprisoned us. Mercy for the desperate !

While for the merely disabused, let them march forward free-souled and calm-hearted. They have nothing to fear, since they can depart ; since behind them stands ever this door that the gods we dream of can never close.

So I meditated on this crowd of dead who sought death : more than eight thousand five hundred in a year. And it came to me that they had come together to hurl into the world a prayer, to cry their will, to demand something, to be made real later, when the world will understand better. It seemed to me that all these beings, tortured, stabbed, poisoned, hanged, suffocated, drowned, flocked in one terrifying horde, like voters at the poll, to say to Society : " Grant us at least a quiet death ! Help us to die, you who did not help us to live ! See, we are many, we have the right to speak in these days of liberty, of philosophic independence, and of democracy. Give those who renounce life the charity of a death neither repulsive nor fearful."

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I let myself dream, leaving my thoughts to roam about this subject with bizarre, mysterious fancies.

I thought myself at one moment in a lovely city. It was Paris ; but of what date ? I wandered down the streets, looking at houses, theatres, public buildings, and then suddenly, in a square, I came on a huge edifice, graceful, alluring, handsome.

I was surprised when I read on the façade, in gilt letters :
"Institute of Voluntary Death" !

How strange are these waking dreams, where the spirit hovers in an unreal yet possible world ! Nothing surprises ; nothing shocks ; and the unbridled fancy no longer distinguishes the comic or the doleful.

I went up to the building, and saw footmen in breeches seated in the hall before a cloak-room, as in the entrance to a club.

I went in to look round. One of them, rising, asked me :

"Do you want anything, sir ?"

"I want to know what this place is."

"Nothing else ?"

"No."

"Perhaps you would like me to take you to the secretary of the institute, sir ?"

I hesitated and then asked :

"I shall not be disturbing him ?"

"Oh, not at all, sir. He is here to see people who want information."

"Very well. I will follow you."

He led me through some corridors in which a few old gentlemen were chatting ; then I was conducted into a charming room, a little sombre perhaps, furnished in black wood. A plump, pot-bellied young man was writing a letter and smoking a cigar the quality of which was evidenced by its excellent bouquet.

He rose. We bowed to each other, and when the footman had gone, he asked :

"How can I be of service to you ?"

"You will forgive my indiscretion, sir," I replied. "I have never seen this establishment before. The few words inscribed on the façade surprised me and I wanted to know what they betokened !"

He smiled before answering, then in a low voice with an air of satisfaction :

"Well, sir, people who want to die are killed here decently and quietly ; perhaps I should not say agreeably."

I did not feel much moved, for this statement seemed to me on the whole very natural and just. But I was astonished that on this planet with its low, utilitarian, humanitarian ideas, egotistical and coercive of all real liberty, an enterprise of such a nature, worthy of an emancipated humanity, dare be undertaken.

I went on :

"How did this happen ?"

"Sir," he replied, "the number of suicides grew so rapidly in the five years following the Exhibition of 1889, that immediate steps became necessary. People were killing themselves in the streets, at parties, in restaurants, at the theatre, in railway carriages, at presidential banquets, everywhere. Not only was it a very ugly sight for those, such as myself, who are really fond of life, but, moreover, a bad example for the children. So it became necessary to centralise suicides."

"How did this rush of suicides arise ?"

"I have no idea. In my heart, I think the world has grown old. We begin to see clearly and to accept our lot with an ill grace. To-day it is with destiny as with the government, we know where we are : we decide that we are being cheated at all points, and so we depart. When we realise that Providence lies, cheats, robs and tricks human beings in the same way as a Deputy his constituents, we get angry, and since we can't nominate another every quarter as we do our privileged representatives, we quit a place so definitely rotten !"

"Really !"

"Oh, I don't complain."

"Will you tell me how the institutè works ?"

"Willingly. You can always become a member when you want to. It is a club."

"A club ?"

"Certainly, sir, and founded by the most eminent men of

the country, by the best imaginations, and the clearest intelligences."

Laughing heartily, he added :

"And I swear people like it here."

"Here ? "

"Yes, here."

"You astound me."

"Lord ! they like it because the members of the club have no fear of death, which is the great spoiler of earthly pleasures ! "

"But why, if they don't kill themselves, are they members of this club ? "

"One can become a member without putting oneself under the obligation of committing suicide."

"Then ? "

"Let me explain. Fired by the immeasurable growth of the number of suicides, and the hideous spectacle they offered, a society of pure benevolence was formed for the protection of the desperate to put at their disposal a calm and painless, if not unforeseen, death."

"Whoever gave authority for such a society ? "

"General Boulanger during his short tenure of office. He could refuse nothing. As a matter of fact, this was the best thing he did. Well, a society was formed of far-sighted, disabused, sceptical men who wished to build in the heart of Paris a kind of temple to the scorn of death. This building was at first a suspected place which no one would come near. Then the founders called a meeting and arranged a great ceremonial opening with Sarah Bernhardt, Judic, Théo, Granier and a score more. MM. de Rezke, Coquelin, Mounet-Sully, Paulus ; then concerts, Dumas' comedies, Meilhac, Falévy, Sardou. We only had one frost, one of Becque's plays, which seemed gloomy, but afterwards was very successful at the Comédie-Française. In the end, all Paris came. The club was launched ! "

"In the midst of jubilations ! What a ghastly jest ! "

"Not at all. Why should death be gloomy ? It should be

indifferent. We have lightened death, we have made it blossom, we have perfumed it, we have made it easy. One learns to relieve suffering by example ; one can see that it is nothing."

"I can quite understand people coming for the shows, but does anyone come for . . . it?"

"Not at once : they were distrustful."

"But later?"

"They came."

"Many?"

"In masses. We have more than forty a day. Practically no more drowned are found in the Seine."

"Who was the first aspirant?"

"A member of the club."

"A God-fearer?"

"I don't think so. A sot, a ruined man, who had been losing heavily at baccarat for three months."

"Really?"

"Our second was an Englishman, an eccentric. Then we had a lot of publicity in the newspapers ; we told all about our methods ; we made up deaths which we thought would attract. But the main impulse came from the lower classes."

"What are your methods?"

"Would you like to go round? I could explain as we went."

"Very much indeed."

He took his hat, opened the door, motioned me before him into a gambling-room where men were playing, as they play in all dives. He led me across several rooms. Everywhere was lively and gay chatter. I have rarely seen so vivacious a club, so animated, so mirthful.

As I seemed surprised, the secretary challenged me :

"Oh, the club has an unprecedented rage. The right people from all over the globe become members, in order to have the air of mocking death. Once they are here, they think they have to be gay in order not to seem afraid. So they joke,

laugh, play the buffoon ; they have wit and learn to acquire it. Nowadays it is the most frequented and the most amusing place in Paris. The women, even, are trying now to organise an annexe for themselves."

"And in spite of all this, you have plenty of suicides in the house ?"

"As I told you, between forty and fifty a day. The upper classes are rare, but there are plenty of poverty-stricken devils. And the middle classes, too, send a good many."

"And how . . . is it done ?"

"Asphyxiation . . . very gently."

"Your apparatus ?"

"A gas of our own invention. We hold the patent. On the other side of the building are the public entrances. Three little doors opening into side alleys. When a man or a woman knocks, we begin by interrogating them ; then we offer them assistance, help, protection. If our client accepts, we make inquiries and often we succeed in saving them."

"Where do you find the money ?"

"We possess a great deal. The membership subscription is very high. Then it is good form to make donations to the institute. The names of all donors are printed in the *Figaro*. Moreover, every wealthy man's suicide costs a thousand francs. They die with an attitude. The poor die gratis. . . ."

"How do you recognise the poor ?"

"Oh, we guess, sir ! And then, they have to bring a certificate of indigence from the local police. If you knew how sinister their entrance is ! I have only visited that part of the establishment once ; I shall never visit it again. The premises are as good as this part, nearly as rich and comfortable, but the people . . . the people !!! If you could only see them arrive, old people in rags on the point of death, people starving of misery for months past, fed at the corners like street dogs ; tattered, gaunt women who are ill, paralysed, incapable of making a living, and say to us, when they tell their circumstances :

‘ You see, it can’t go on, for I can do nothing and earn nothing.’ I saw one old woman of eighty-seven who had lost all her children and all her grandchildren, and had been sleeping out of doors for six weeks. I was sick with emotion at the sight. But then, we have so many different cases, not to mention those who say nothing except to ask : ‘ Where is it ? ’ Those we let in and it is all over at once.”

I repeated, with constricted heart :

“ And . . . where is it ? ”

“ Here.”

He opened a door and went on :

“ Come in. It is the room specially reserved for members, the one that is used least. As yet we have had no more than eleven annihilations.”

“ Oh, you call it an . . . annihilation ? ”

“ Yes, sir. After you.”

I hesitated, but at last went in. It proved a delightful gallery, a kind of conservatory, surrounded poetically in a kind of landscape tapestry by glass of pale blue, soft rose and light green. In this charming room there were divans, magnificent palms, sweet-scented flowers, particularly roses, books on the table, the *Revue des Deux Mondes*, boxes of cigars, and, what surprised me, Vichy pastilles in a bonbonnière.

As I showed my astonishment my guide said : “ Oh, people often come here for a chat,” and went on :

“ The public-rooms are like this, though furnished more simply.”

I asked a question.

He pointed with his finger to an easy-chair upholstered in creamy *crêpe de Chine* with white embroidery, beneath a tall shrub of species unknown to me, round the foot of which ran a flower bed of reseda.

The secretary added in a lower voice :

“ The flower and the scent can be changed at will, for our gas, which is quite imperceptible, lends to death the scene of

whatever flower the subject prefers. It is volatilised with essences. Would you like to smell it for a second ? ”

“ No, thanks,” I replied quickly, “ not yet.”

He began laughing.

“ Oh, there’s no danger, sir. I have made sure of that myself several times.”

I was afraid to appear cowardly. I replied :

“ Well, I’m quite agreeable.”

“ Sit down on the *putter-to-sleep*, then.”

Slightly nervous, I seated myself on the low *crêpe de Chine* chair, and then lay full length. Almost at once I was enveloped by a delicious scent of reseda. I opened my mouth to receive it more easily, for my soul was already growing torpid, was forgetting, was savouring, in the first discomfort of asphyxiation the bewitching intoxication of an enchanting and withering opium.

I was shaken by the arm.

“ Ah, sir,” said the secretary, laughing, “ I see that you are letting yourself get caught.”

But a voice, a real and not a dream voice, greeted me with a pleasant ring :

“ Morning, sir, I trust you’re well.”

My dream fled. I saw the Seine beneath the sun, and, coming along the path, the local policeman, who touched his black *képi* with its silver braid with his right hand.

I answered :

“ Good morning, Marinel. Where are you off to ? ”

“ I’m going to report on a drowned man they’ve fished up near Morillons. Another one who has chucked himself into the Seine. He’d taken off his trousers to tie his legs with.”

17-2
MADAME HERMET

MADMEN FASCINATE ME. THESE BEINGS LIVE IN A MYSTERIOUS land of fantastic dreams, in that impenetrable cloud of insanity where all that they have seen on earth, all that they have loved, all that they have done, lives again for them in an imaginary existence outside all the laws that govern the world and order human thought.

For them the impossible does not exist, the unlikely disappears, the fairy world becomes the natural world, and the supernatural familiar. Logic, that ancient barrier, reason, that ancient wall, good sense, that ancient balustrade of the mind, is broken, shattered, demolished by their imagination, which has been loosed into freedom, has escaped into the realms of fantasy to which no bounds are set, and rushes forward in fabulous leaps without let or hindrance. For them everything happens and everything can happen. They make no efforts to conquer events, overcome resistances, surmount obstacles. A mere whim of their fantasy-creating will suffices for them to become princes, emperors or gods, to possess all the riches of the world, all the good things of life, to enjoy all pleasures, to be always strong, always beautiful, always young, always loved. Of all creatures on this earth, they alone are happy, since for them reality no longer exists. I like to hang over their vagabond minds, as one hangs over an abyss in whose depths boils an unknown torrent, come one knows not whence and going one knows not whither.

But it avails us nothing to hang over these ravines, since we could never know whence comes that stream or whither it goes. After all, it is only a stream, like the streams that run in broad daylight, and a sight of it would teach us very little.

It avails us as little to hang over the minds of madmen, for their most fantastic ideas are, in effect, no more than ideas already known to us, made strange only because they are no longer shackled by Reason. That capricious spring confounds and amazes us because we do not see the place of its rising. Doubtless a little stone dropped in its course is enough to produce these whirlpools. Nevertheless, madmen fascinate me, and I keep going back to them, attracted in spite of myself by this commonplace mystery of insanity.

But one day, as I was visiting one of their asylums, the doctor who was escorting me said :

"Come, I'll show you an interesting case."

And he opened a cell in which a woman of about forty years of age, still beautiful, was seated in a big arm-chair, gazing fixedly at her face in a small hand-glass.

As soon as she saw us, she stood up, ran to the farther side of the room to get a veil thrown down on a chair, very carefully swathed her face in it, then returned, replying to our greetings by a sign of her head.

"Well," said the doctor, "how are you this morning?"

She uttered a deep sigh.

"Oh, ill, very ill, doctor, the marks get worse every day."

He replied with an air of conviction :

"No, no, I assure you that you're mistaken."

She drew close to him to murmur :

"No. I'm sure of it. I've counted ten more marks this morning, three on the right cheek, four on the left cheek, and three on my forehead. It's frightful, frightful. I daren't let anyone see me now, not even my son, no, not even he! I'm ruined, I'm disfigured for life."

She sank back into her arm-chair and began to sob.

The doctor took a chair, seated himself near her, and in a gentle, comforting voice said :

"Come now, let me look, I assure you it's nothing. By a slight cauterisation, I can make them all disappear."

She shook her head, without saying a word. He tried to touch her veil, but she grasped it in both hands with such violence that her fingers went through it.

He began afresh to exhort and reassure her.

"Come, now, you know quite well that I remove the ugly pockmarks from your skin every time and that you can't see them at all when I have attended to them. If you don't show them to me, I can't cure you."

She murmured :

"I'm quite willing to let you look again but I don't know this gentleman who is with you."

"He is a doctor too, who can attend to you even better than I can."

Then she uncovered her face, but her fear and her emotion, her shame at being seen, made her blush even over throat, to the point where her gown covered it. She lowered her eyes, turned her face now to the right and now to the left, to escape our gaze, and stammered :

"Oh, it makes me suffer agonies to let you see me like this. It's horrible, isn't it? Isn't it horrible?"

I looked at her in the utmost amazement, for she had nothing on her face, not a mark, not a stain, not a sign nor a scar.

She turned towards me, keeping her eyes lowered, and said to me :

"It was through nursing my son that I contracted this frightful disease. I saved him but I am disfigured. I gave my beauty to my poor child. Well, I did my duty, and my conscience is at rest. If I suffer, only God knows it."

The doctor had taken from his pocket a slender water-colour brush.

"Allow me," said he, "I'll put it all right for you."

She turned to him her right cheek, and he began to lay light touches on it, as if he were putting small dabs of paint on it. He did the same to the left cheek, then to the chin, then the forehead ; then he cried :

"Look, it's all gone, all gone."

She took up her glass, gazed at herself for a long time with a searching intensity, a harrowing intensity, a savagely concentrated mental effort to discover something, then she sighed :

"No. There's very little to see now. Thank you very much indeed."

The doctor rose. He took leave of her, ushered me out and followed me ; and as soon as the door was closed, said :

"I'll tell you that poor woman's dreadful story."

Her name is Mme Hermet. She was very beautiful, a great coquette, loved of many, and full of the joy of life.

She was a woman of the type whose life is sustained, guided and consoled only by their beauty and their desire to please.

The unremitting anxiety to preserve her freshness, the care of her face, her hands, teeth, of every part of her body that she could display, absorbed all her time and all her attention.

She became a widow, with one son. The child was brought up like all children of much admired women. She loved him, however.

He grew up, and she grew old. Whether or not she saw the fatal moment coming, I don't know. Did she, like so many others, gaze every morning for hours and hours at the skin that used to be so delicate, so clear and fresh, and now is wrinkling a little under the eyes, creasing itself in a thousand lines, imperceptible now, but bound to deepen and deepen, day by day, month by month ? And did she see, more and more strongly marked, advancing with slow relentless certainty, the long lines graven on the forehead, those thin serpents whose progress nothing halts ? Did she endure the torture, the abominable torture, of the looking-glass, of the small silver hand-glass that she could not resolve to leave on the table, then threw down in anger, and a moment later picked up again, to see once more, ever nearer and nearer, the hateful, silent ravages of approaching age ? Did she shut herself up

ten, twenty times a day, leaving, without explanation, the drawing-room where her friends were chatting, to go up to her bedroom and, safeguarded by bolts and locks, gaze again on the destruction at work in the ripened, fading flesh, to examine despairingly the hardly perceptible advance that so far no one else seems to notice, but of which she herself is bitterly aware? She knows where the grimmest ravages are, where the tooth of age bites deepest. And the glass, the small, round glass in its frame of chased silver, says dreadful things to her, for it speaks, it seems to laugh, it rails on her and predicts all that is coming to pass, all the miseries of her body, and the atrocious torture of her mind that will endure to the day of her death, which will be that of her deliverance.

Did she weep, distracted, on her knees, her forehead on the ground, and pray, pray, pray to Him who kills His creatures thus, giving them youth only to make age the more bitter, and lending them beauty only to take it back almost at once; did she pray Him, implore Him, to grant to her what He had never granted to anyone, to allow her to keep until her last day, charm and freshness and grace? Then, realising that in vain does she implore the implacable Unknown who adds year to year in endless number, did she roll with writhing arms on the carpet of her room, did she beat her forehead on its furniture and stifle in her throat her frightful, despairing cries?

She must have endured these tortures. For this is what happened:

One day (she was then thirty-five years old) her son, aged fifteen, fell ill.

He took to his bed, although the doctors were unable to diagnose the cause of his illness or its nature. An abbé, his tutor, watched over him, hardly leaving his side, while Mme Hermet came morning and evening to hear his report.

She entered in the morning in a dressing-gown, smiling, already scented, and asked, from the door:

"Well, George, are you getting better?"

The tall youngster, crimson, his face swollen, and wasted by the fever, would answer :

" Yes, mummie, a little better."

She lingered a few moments in the bedroom, examining the bottles of medicine and making little grimaces of disgust, then suddenly cried : " Oh, I was forgetting something very important," and she took herself off, running, leaving behind her the delicate fragrance of her morning toilet.

At night she appeared in her evening-gown, in a still greater hurry, for she was always late, and she had just time to ask :

" Well, what did the doctor say ? "

The abbé replied :

" He's not sure yet, Madame."

But one evening, the abbé replied :

" Madame, your son has taken smallpox."

She uttered a loud cry of fear and rushed away.

When her maid came to her room next morning the first thing she noticed in the room was a strong smell of burnt sugar, and she found her mistress, wide-awake, her face pale for lack of sleep, and shaking with anguish in her bed.

As soon as the shutters were open Mme Hermet asked :

" How is George ? "

" Oh, not at all well to-day, Madame."

She did not get up until midday, ate two eggs with a cup of tea, as if she herself were ill, then she went out and consulted a chemist as to the best methods of keeping off the infection of smallpox.

She did not return until dinner-time, laden with phials, and shut herself at once in her room, where she soaked herself in disinfectants.

The abbé was waiting for her in the dining-room. As soon as she caught sight of him she cried, in a voice full of emotion :

" Well ? "

" Oh, no better. The doctor is very anxious."

She began to cry, and could eat nothing, so wretched was she.

The next day, at dawn, she sent for news: the report was no better and she spent the whole day in her room, where small braziers were smoking and filling the room with powerful odours. Moreover, her maid declared that she heard her moaning all the evening.

A whole week passed in this way: she did nothing at all but go out for an hour or two to take the air, towards the middle of the afternoon.

She asked for news every hour now, and sobbed when each report was worse.

On the morning of the eleventh day, the abbé was announced, entered her room, his face grave and pale, and declining the chair that she offered him, said:

"Madame, your son is very ill, and he wants to see you."

She flung herself on her knees, crying:

"Oh, my God, oh, my God, I daren't! My God, my God! help me!"

The priest answered:

"The doctor holds out very little hope, Madame, and George is waiting for you."

Then he went out.

Two hours later, as the boy, feeling himself near death, asked again for his mother, the abbé went back to her room and found her still on her knees, still weeping and repeating:

"I won't. . . . I won't. . . . I am too frightened . . . I won't. . . ."

He tried to persuade her, to stiffen her resolution, to lead her out. He succeeded only in giving her a fit of hysteria which lasted long and made her scream.

The doctor came again towards evening, was told of her cowardice and declared that he himself would fetch her, by persuasion or force. But when, after having exhausted all his arguments, he put his arm around her to carry her off to her son, she seized the door and clung to it so desperately that it was impossible to tear her away. Then, released, she prostrated

herself at the doctor's feet, begging for pardon, and accusing herself of wickedness. She kept crying: "Oh, he's not going to die, tell me he's not going to die, I implore you, tell him that I love him, that I adore him. . . ."

The boy lay at the point of death. Realising that he only had a few moments left, he begged them to persuade his mother to say good-bye to him. With strange insight that the dying sometimes possess, he had realised the truth, divined it, and said: "If she is afraid to come in, just beg her to come along the balcony as far as my window so that at least I can see her and say good-bye to her by a look, since I may not kiss her."

The doctor and the abbé went back once more to this woman. "You will run no risk at all," they declared, "since there will be glass between you and him."

She consented to come, covered her head, took a bottle of smelling-salts, made three steps along the balcony, then suddenly, hiding her face in her hands, she moaned: "No . . . no . . . I shall never dare to look at him . . . never . . . I'm too ashamed . . . I'm too afraid . . . no . . . I can't."

They tried to drag her along, but she held with both hands to the bars and uttered such wails that the people passing by in the street lifted their heads.

And the dying boy waited, his eyes turned towards this window, he waited, putting off death until he should have looked one last time on that sweet, beloved face, his mother's blessed face.

He waited long, and night fell. Then he turned his face to the wall and never spoke again.

When day broke, he was dead. The next day, she was a madwoman.

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CHAPTER VI.

THE LITERATURE OF THE ENGLISH RESTORATION,
INCLUDING MILTON.

I. MILTON.

As to the dates of the successive early editions of Milton's works, their full titles, and all requisite information concerning them, Masson's monumental work, with its Index, cited below, should of course be consulted. See also the bibliography in R. Garnett's *Life of John Milton*. London. 1890.

A. ORIGINAL WORKS.

(1) POEMS.

(a) *Original Editions.* [In order of publication.]

- Milton, John. [Comus.] A maske presented at Ludlow Castle, on Michaelmasse night, 1634, before The Right Honorable John Earle of Bridgewater. London. 1637.
- [Lycidas.] Justa Edovardo King naufrago ab Amicis moerentibus amoris et *μυειας χαριν*. Cambridge. 1638. (The English verse in this has a separate title: *Obsequies to the memorie of Mr Edward King, A.D. 1638.*)
- Poems of Mr John Milton, both English and Latin, compos'd at several times. London. 1645.
- Paradise Lost. A Poem written in Ten Books. London. 1667. The same. 1668 (with note on "The Verse," and The Argument).
- [Shepherd, R. H.] Paradise Lost in ten books. Text exactly reproduced from the first edn., with Appendices containing additions in later issues. London. 1873.
- Paradise Lost. A Poem in Twelve Books. Second Edition. Revised and augmented. London. 1674.
- Facsimile of the Milton ms. in the Library of Trinity College, Cambridge. Edited by W. Aldis Wright. Cambridge. 1899.
- Paradise Regain'd. A Poem. In IV Books. To which is added Samson Agonistes. London. 1671.
- Poems etc. upon Several Occasions. Both English and Latin etc. Composed at several times. With a small Tractate of Education to Mr Hartlib. London. 1673.

(b) *Standard Modern Editions.*

- The Poetical Works of John Milton. Ed. D. Masson. Three vols. London. 1874.

- Milton, John. *The Poetical Works of John Milton. With introductions by D. Masson. Globe Edition. London. 1905.*
 — Milton's Poems, with Critical Notes by W. Aldis Wright. Cambridge. 1903.
 — Poems upon several occasions, English, Italian and Latin. With translations, notes etc. By J. Warton. 2nd edn. London. 1791.

(2) PROSE WORKS.

(a) *Original Editions. [In order of publication.]*

- Hall, John, Bishop of Norwich. *A Humble Remonstrance. London. 1641.*
 [Smectymnuus.] *An Answer to a Booke entituled, an Humble Remonstrance. London. 1641.*
A Defence of the Humble Remonstrance, against the frivolous and false exceptions of Smectymnuus. London. 1641.
 Milton, John. *Animadversions upon the Remonstrant's Defence, against Smectymnuus. London. 1641.*
 Smectymnuus. *A Vindication of the answer to the Humble Remonstrance. London. 1641.*
 [Hall, John.] *A short answer to the tedious Vindication of Smectymnuus. By the authors of The Humble Remonstrance. London. 1641.*
 Smectymnuus. *A modest confutation of a slanderous libell, entituled, Animadversions upon the remonstrant's defense against Smectymnuus. [London.] 1642.*
 Milton, John. *An apology against a pamphlet call'd a modest confutation of the Animadversions upon the Remonstrant against Smectymnuus. London. 1642.*
 — *Of Reformation touching Church-Discipline in England. Two Bookes. London. 1641.*
 — *Of prelatial Episcopacy. London. 1641.*
 — *The reason of Church-governement urg'd against Prelaty. In two Books. London. 1641.*
 — *The Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce: restor'd to the good of both sexes, from the bondage of Canon Law, and other mistakes, to Christian freedom, guided by the Rule of Charity. London. 1643.*
 — *The judgment of Martin Bucer concerning Divorce...now Englisht. London. 1644.*
 — *Tetrachordon: Expositions upon the foure chief places in Scripture, which treat of Mariage, or nullities in Mariage. London. 1645.*
 — *Colasterion: a Reply to a nameless answer against the Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce. London. 1645.*
 — *The Tenure of Kings and Magistrates. London. 1649 (1648).*
 — *EIKONOKLASTΗΣ in Answer to a Book Intitl'd EIKON ΒΑΣΙΛΙΚΗ. London. 1649.*
 [Saumaise, Claude de.] *Defensio Regia, pro Carolo I ad Serenissimum Regem Carolum II, Filium natu majorem, Heredem et Successorem legitimum. [Leyden.] 1649.*
 — *Ad Ioannem Miltonum Responsio, opus posthumum Claudii Salmasii. Dijon. 1660.*
 Milton, John. *Joannis Miltoni Angli pro populo anglicano defensio contra Claudii anonymi alias Salmasii defensionem regiam. London. 1650.*
 — *Editio emendatior. London. 1651.*

- Milton, John. *Joannis Miltoni Angli pro populo Anglicano defensio secunda*. London. 1654.
- *Second defence of the people of England*. [Translated by Francis Wragham.] London. 1816.
- *A treatise of Civil power in Ecclesiastical causes*. London. 1659.
- *Considerations touching the likeliest means to remove Hirelings out of the Church, wherein is also discours'd of Tithes, Church-fees, Church-revenues; And whether any maintenance of ministers can be settl'd by law*. London. 1659.
- *The Readie and Easie Way to establish a Free Commonwealth*. London. 1660.
- *Of true religion, haeresie, schism, toleration, and what best means may be us'd against the growth of Popery*. London. 1673.
- *Ioannis Miltonii Angli Epistolarum Familiarium Liber unus: quibus accesserunt, ejusdem, jam olim in Collegio adolescentis, Prolusiones quaedam oratoriae*. London. 1674.
- *A Brief History of Moscovia*. London. 1682.
- *A Defence of the People of England*. London. 1692.
- *De Doctrina Christiana libri duo posthumi*. Ed. Carolus Ricardus Sumner. Cambridge and London. 1825.
- *A Treatise of Christian Doctrine compiled from the Holy Scriptures alone*. Translated by Charles R. Sumner. Cambridge and London. 1825.
- *Original Letters and Papers of State addressed to Cromwell (1649-58), found among the collections of Milton*. Ed. J. Nickolls. London. 1743.
- *Original Papers, illustrative of Life and Writings of Milton; including sixteen Letters of State written by him. With an Appendix of Documents relating to his association with the Powell family*. Ed. W. D. Hamilton. (Camden Society.) London. 1859.
- *A Common-place book of John Milton, and a Latin Essay and Latin Verses presumed to be by Milton*. Ed. Alfred J. Horwood. (Camden Society.) London. 1876 and 1877.

(b) *Later Editions.*

- *The Works of John Milton, Historical, Political, and Miscellaneous. To which is prefixed, an account of his life and writings [by T. Birch]*. Two vols. London. 1753.
- *Prose Works*. Ed. Charles Symmons. Seven vols. London. 1806.
- *English Prose Writings*. Ed. H. Morley. (Carisbrooke Library.) London. 1890.
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B. BIOGRAPHY AND CRITICISM.

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II. THE LITERATURE OF THE RESTORATION.

A. ORIGINAL AND LATER EDITIONS.

[The original editions of each work are mentioned in order of publication. Of later editions, except in special instances, only collective editions are cited.]

1. DRYDEN.

(a) Tragedies.

The Indian Emperor, or The Conquest of Mexico by the Spaniards. London. 1667.
 Tyrannick Love, or The Royal Martyr. London. 1670. The Conquest of Granada by the Spaniards. London. 1672. Amboyna. London. 1673.
 Aureng-zebe. London. 1676. All for Love, or The World well lost. London. 1678. Oedipus. London. 1678. The Duke of Guise. London. 1683. Don Sebastian, King of Portugal. London. 1690. Cleomenes, The Spartan Heroe. London. 1692.

(b) Comedies.

The Wild Gallant. London. 1669. Sir Martin Mar-all, or The Feigned Innocence. London. 1668. An Evening's Love, or The Mock Astrologer. London. 1671. The Assignment, or Love in a Nunnery. London. 1673. The Kind Keeper, or M. Limberham. London. 1680. Amphitryon, or the two Socias. London. 1690.

(c) Tragi-comedies.

Secret Lover, or The Maiden Queen. London. 1668. The Rival Ladies. London. 1669. Marriage à-la-mode. London. 1673. Troilus and Cressida, or Truth found too late. London. 1679. The Spanish Fryar, or The Double Discovery. London. 1681. Love Triumphant, or Nature will prevail. London. 1694.

(d) *Operas.*

- The State of Innocence, or the Fall of Man. London. 1677. Albion and Albanus. London. 1685. King Arthur, or The British Worthy. London. 1691.

(e) *Other Poetical Works.*

- A poem upon the death of his late Highness, Oliver, Lord Protector of England, Scotland, and Ireland. London. 1659. *Astraea Redux*, a poem on the happy Restoration of his Sacred Majesty Charles II. London. 1660. *Annus Mirabilis*, The Year of Wonders, 1666. An historical poem. London. 1667. *Absalom and Achitophel*, a Poem. London. 1681. The Medall, a Satyre against Sedition. London. 1682. *MacFlecknoe*, or, a Satire on the True Blue Protestant Poet. London. 1682. The Second part of *Absalom and Achitophel*, a Poem. London. 1682. *Religio Laici*, or a Layman's Faith. A Poem. London. 1682. *Threnodia Augustalis*. A Funeral Pindarique Poem. To the happy Memory of King Charles II. London. 1685. The Hind and the Panther, a Poem. In three Parts. London. 1687. A Song for St Cecilia's Day. London. 1687. Alexander's Feast, or the Power of Musique, an ode in honor of St Cecilia's Day. London. 1697. *Fables, Ancient and Modern*, translated into verse from Homer, Ovid, Boccaccio and Chaucer: with original poems. London. 1700.

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2. OTHER WRITERS.

- Behn, Aphara. *Plays*: The Forc'd Marriage, or the Jealous Bridegroom. A Tragi-comedy. London. 1671. The Amorous Prince, or the Curious Husband, a Comedy. London. 1671. The Dutch Lover, a Comedy. London. 1673. The Rover, or the Banish'd Cavaliers, a Comedy. London. 1677, 1681. The Debauchee, a Comedy. 1677. The Town-Fopp, or Sir Timothy Tawdry. London. 1677. Sir Patient Fancy, a Comedy. 1678. A Night's Intrigue, or the Feign'd Curtizans, a Comedy. London. 1679. The Roundheads, or The Good Old Cause, a Comedy. London. 1682. The City Heiress, or Sir Timothy Treat-all, a Comedy. London. 1682. The False Count, or a New Way to Play an Old Game. London. 1682. The Lucky Chance, or An Alderman's Bargain, a Comedy. London. 1687. The Younger Brother, or the Amorous Jilt, a Comedy. London. 1696.

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- *Comedies*: *The Countrey Wit*. London. 1675. *City Politiques*. London. 1683. *Sir Courtly Nice, or It cannot be*. London. 1685. *The English Friar, or The Town Sparks*. London. 1690. *The Married Beau, or The Curious Impertinent*. London. 1694.
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CHAPTER VIII.

THE ANGLO-DUTCH WARS.

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[See also under (2) below.]

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*Rawlinson Manuscripts in the Bodleian Library at Oxford.

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[See also under (1) above.]

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CHAPTER X.

THE REVOLUTION AND THE REVOLUTION SETTLEMENT
IN GREAT BRITAIN.

(1) ENGLAND, 1687-1702.

I. ARCHIVES.

A. AT THE BRITISH MUSEUM.

a. Documents connected with the Revolution.

Add. mss. 10,118. Materials for History of James, by Joseph Johnston, Prior of Benedictines of St Edmund's in Paris.

Add. mss. 15,614. Panegyrics on Mary of Modena.

The attack on the Universities is described in Lord Guilford's mss., Add. mss. 32,523, Oxford, ff. 59-64, Cambridge, ff. 64-7. An excellent anonymous contemporary account of "the Cambridge case and all the proceedings therein" is to be found in the Treasury of Peterhouse, Cambridge.

Documents connected with the Revolution 1687-9 will be found in Add. mss. 9828, f. 24, 12,097, ff. 33-4, 17,017, f. 125, 27,382, 28,053 (Correspondence of Danby, 1660-96), 33,286 (Documents concerning the birth of the Prince of Wales), 32,095 (Letters as to James' first flight), 33,923 (Narratives of Sir J. Knatchbull and Sir E. Dering on James' first flight; very valuable).

34,487 (News letters sent into the country chiefly in last six months of 1688).

34,515, ff. 194, 208.

Stowe mss. 222, ff. 383, 6; 241, f. 56; 540, f. 59.

Add. mss. 32,681 (Scattered papers on Church matters by Burnet, chiefly 1688c.).

Add. mss. 32,520. North, Dudley, Lord Guilford (views on the Regency question, 1688. Essay on the Royal Prerogative etc.).

Add. mss. 32,680 (Papers of Henry Sidney; mostly published in Blencowe's Life, q.v.).

b. Documents concerning Foreign Affairs.

Add. mss. 28,927, f. 140 (A few fragments of King William's notes and letters).

Add. mss. 24,905 (William's letters to Godolphin (691-3-); not of much value).

The Mackintosh Collection, parts of which have appeared in the Historical mss. Commission publications, is of great value. The most important are Add. mss. 34,504-5, Despatches of William to Heinsius, 34,506, Correspondence of Heinsius, and 34,512, Summaries of the Despatches of the Dutch Ambassadors, 1685-8. [Although these were used by Macaulay, much information of first-rate importance is still to be gleaned from them.]

c. Documents exhibiting Economic and Social Conditions.

Stowe mss. 292. An elaborate comparison as regards population and taxes between England, Holland and France.

Add. mss. 15,633. Statements of Accounts 1688-1702.

Add. mss. 10,119-23. Egerton mss. 648. General account of Finance, Trade, Revenue etc.

Add. mss. 6703. History of the Exchequer Bills. ff. 32-42. [An instructive contemporary account.]

d. Documents exhibiting the working of the Executive.

Add. mss. 28,132; Add. mss. 34,349. Calendar of Privy Council business, and powers of the Board.

Add. mss. 35,107. Council notes by Southwell, clerk to Council, 1660-1708.

The notes on the Council in 1695 should be compared with William III's Privy Council Register, Vol. iv, pp. 364 et seqq., at the Privy Council Office, and with Home Office Domestic Papers—Secretaries' Letter Book, No. 100, at the Record Office (1694-1701).

B. AT THE RECORD OFFICE.

The Secretaries' Letter Books, Vol. i-vi (1689-1703), contain some information about domestic affairs and the working of executive government.

C. AT THE PRIVY COUNCIL OFFICE.

Privy Council Registers, James II, vol. ii (1687-8), William III (1688-90), contain important details regarding the Revolution Settlement.

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(3) IRELAND, 1660-1700.

I. ORIGINAL SOURCES.

For the history of the Restoration Settlement the most valuable (and hitherto unutilised) source of information is a series of folio volumes, marked A to M, preserved in the Public Record Office, Dublin, consisting of original documents and transcripts ranging from 1660-74. These volumes, which first came to light owing to the researches instituted by the Record Commissioners in 1811 (see 15th Annual Report, 1825), owed their origin to a commission of inquiry into the working of the Acts of Settlement and Explanation, which Richard Talbot, afterwards Duke

of Tyrconnel, succeeded in getting appointed in 1672. The commission was revoked at the instance of the English Parliament and the documents, like so many others, passed into the hands of private individuals. All but one volume (J) were recovered by the Record Commissioners, and in 1886 they were transferred to their present resting-place (cf. Deputy-Keeper's Reports, xix, App. v, pp. 35-87). Duplicates of many of these documents, especially petitions for restoration, are preserved in the Rolls Office, Fetter Lane, and are now (with other state papers of Charles' reign) being calendared by R. P. Mahaffy.

For the proceedings of the Court of Claims, which began its labours in January, 1666, such of them as escaped destruction by fire in 1711 have been catalogued in the Supplement to the Eighth Report of the Record Commissioners (1819), pp. 248-300, and are now to be found in the Public Record Office, Dublin, in 35 vols. folio. To these, in this connection, must be added the books of Survey and Distribution in the same repository (cf. Bibliography, vol. iv. p. 913). Bearing upon the same subject, though of less importance, are certain volumes in the Library of Trinity College, Dublin, viz. E. 3. 24, Proceedings of the Commissioners from the Convention in 1660 etc. (cf. F. 2. 1, Nos. 22, 23, 25); F. 3. 18, No. 43, Letters relating to parliamentary proceedings in 1661; F. 1. 22, No. 6, A Defence of the Settlement of Ireland in answer to Sir Richard Nagle's famous "Coventry Letter." Abstracts of the decrees of the Court of Claims (1663) will be found in British Museum Egerton ms. 789 and certificates of the Commissioners of the Court of Claims (1666) in Add. ms. 18,023.

For the Duke of Ormond's second and third administration (1661-9; 1677-85), in addition to the official documents in the Rolls Office, the papers in the Carte collection in the Bodleian Library, Oxford, reported on by C. W. Russell and J. P. Prendergast in the Thirty-second Report of the Deputy-Keeper of the Public Records, Appendix 1, London, 1871 (cf. Bibliography, vol. iv, p. 913), and those preserved in Kilkenny Castle, now being calendared for the Historical ms. Commission by C. Litton Falkiner, are prime sources of information. A narrative by Sir Theophilus Jones of the conspiracy of 1663 will be found in Trinity College, Dublin, F. 3. 18, No. 47, and another in Brit. Mus. Sloane ms. 4784, No. 19. The Remonstrance of the Irish to Charles II (1666) is in Add. ms. 14,422.

For the viceroyalty of Arthur Capel, Earl of Essex (1672-7), his correspondence in 22 vols., formerly part of the Stowe collection and now in the British Museum, is the principal and indispensable source of information. A copy of the rules for the regulation of corporations (1672) is in Trinity College, Dublin, F. 1. 2.

Clarendon's letters have been published; but a collection of those of his successor, the Duke of Tyrconnel, at present scattered about in all directions, is one of the chief desiderata of Irish history.

For the Revolution and War in Ireland the most important documents have been published. But among the unpublished sources are (1) a collection of seven folio volumes, containing some original letters from James II to Hamilton, during the siege of Derry, preserved in the Royal Irish Academy, Dublin; (2) the correspondence of George Clarke, secretary-at-war (1690-4), in 13 volumes, preserved in Trinity College, Dublin, K. 5. 1-13, partly used by W. Harris for his *Life of William III* (cf. fol. ed., p. 264 note); (3) a volume of Nairne Papers (1689-1701) in the Carte Collection, vol. clxxxi; (4) papers formerly belonging to Sir Robert and Edward Southwell, principal secretaries of State in Ireland. These papers, at one time in the collection of Sir Thomas Phillipps of Middle Hill, Cheltenham, are now divided between the British Museum, Trinity College, Dublin, and the Public Record Office, Dublin. For Ireland for the period in question the following are of importance:—Trinity College, Dublin, i. 6. 9, 3 vols., especially vol. ii, No. 36, for the Proclamation of 7 July, 1691 (cf. T. K. Abbott's Catalogue of mss., pp. 213-20); Public Record Office, Dublin, volumes numbered 132, 137 and especially 141-5,

containing an account of William's progress in Ireland (cf. Deputy-Keeper's Report, xxx, pp. 37-9 and App. i, pp. 44-58); (5) a considerable mass of only partly used material in the Archives des Affaires Étrangères, Paris. Among documents of minor importance attention may be called to some letters of James II relating to Derry and a list of families who fled from Ireland *circa* 1688, in Trinity College, Dublin, E. 2. 19 and F. 4. 3; a journal from London relating to the relief of Londonderry etc. 1689, in the Royal Irish Academy; and some legal proceedings arising out of the Rebellion, in the Public Record Office, Dublin (cf. Deputy-Keeper's Report, xvii, App. i, pp. 15-19).

For the period immediately following the Revolution we are dependent almost entirely on the Rolls Office and the Clarke and Southwell collections already mentioned. In connection with the proceedings arising out of the Act of Resumption reference should be made to the "Trustees' Surveys" in 13 vols. in the Public Record Office, of which a catalogue was published in the Record Commissioners' Eighth Report (1819), App. iii, pp. 334-52 and 613-21; and to Brit. Mus. Add. mss. 13,956, 14,406, 17,508, 17,774, 18,022 and 18,718.

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[See also *Bibliography to Chapter XVIII of Vol. III* (m, c).]

CHAPTER XI.

TOLERATION IN ENGLAND.

The following works deal more specially with the growth of Toleration in England from Oliver Cromwell to the year 1690. Information on the subject will of course be also found in the standard histories, the diarists, and the collections of tracts, for which see Bibliographies to Chapters xii, xv and xix of vol. iv, and to Chapters v and ix, vi, and x of the present volume.

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CHAPTER XII.

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CHAPTER XIII.

THE TREATIES OF PARTITION AND THE
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CHAPTER XIV.

THE WAR OF THE SPANISH SUCCESSION.

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[For earlier peace negotiations see previous Section.]

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CHAPTER XV.

PARTY GOVERNMENT UNDER QUEEN ANNE.

I. ARCHIVES.

A. AT THE BRITISH MUSEUM.

The age of Anne is not quite as rich in unpublished material as that of William. But the Jacobite despatches and papers are of great importance.

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[See also Bibliography to Chapter XIV.]

CHAPTER XVI.

RUSSIA BEFORE PETER THE GREAT (1477-1682).

The construction of a satisfactory bibliography to this Chapter is practically impossible, because there is no complete collection of Russian historical works in England. The British Museum collection is considerable, but far from complete, and there is no other.

Historical materials existing in Russia are being continually published, not only by government commissions, but by many historical societies and local records commissions, in their Memoirs, Transactions etc.; such as the Archaeographical Commission of Vilna, the Records Commissions of Nizhni Novgorod, Riazan, Simbirsk, the Statistical Committee of Vitebsk etc. Especially valuable are the *Chteniia* of the Imperial Society of History and Russian Antiquities, of Moscow (1st series, 1846-8, 2nd series, 1858 sqq.). This general reference to this class of publications must suffice.

Besides the material in Russian archives, there are unpublished documents in foreign archives and libraries (Rome, Vienna, Paris etc.; see the bibliographies in Pierling, *La Russie et le Saint-Siège*. Paris. 1885).

In the enumeration under III it has been found necessary, from considerations of space, to exclude (with a few exceptions) monographs and essays contained in periodical publications (*Zhurnal ministverstva narodnago prosvieshcheniia*, *Istoricheskii Viestnik*, *Russkaia Starina*, are the most important historical journals in Russia).

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CHAPTER XVII.

PETER THE GREAT AND HIS PUPILS.
(1689-1730.)

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[See also *Bibliographies to Chapters I etc. (The Thirty Years' War)*, and to *Chapter IX in Vol. IV*, and to *Chapter XXI of the present volume.*]

CHAPTER XIX.

CHARLES XII AND THE GREAT NORTHERN WAR.
(1697-1721.)

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CHAPTERS XX AND XXI.

THE ORIGIN OF THE PRUSSIAN MONARCHY.
THE GREAT ELECTOR AND THE FIRST PRUSSIAN KING.

[See, for the period of the Reformation, the *Bibliographies of Chapters IV-VIII in Vol. II*; for the period of the Counter-Reformation and the sinking of Imperial authority, the *Bibliographies of Chapters V and XXI in Vol. III*; for the times of the Thirty Years War and the period from the Peace of Westphalia to the Peace of Oliva, the *Bibliography of the Thirty Years War, Chapter XX in Vol. IV*; and see also the *Bibliographies of Chapters II and XVIII in the present Volume.*]

I. BIBLIOGRAPHY AND MS. SOURCES.

E. Brandenburg's new (7th) edition of Dahlmann-Waitz's *Quellenkunde der Deutschen Geschichte* (Leipzig, 1906), with unique completeness covers every part and every stage of the history of the Prussian State. Free use has been made of this indispensable work, as well as of the second edition of V. Loewe's *Bücherkunde der Deutschen Geschichte* (Berlin, 1905), in the revision and enlargement of the present bibliography, which has been compiled for its own limited purposes.

For a survey of the contents of the Prussian archives and libraries, in which are to be found the body of the ms. sources of Prussian history, see, besides C. A. H. Burkhardt's *Hand- und Adressbuch der Deutschen Archive* (Leipzig, 1887), and P. Schwenke's *Adressbuch der Deutschen Bibliotheken* (Leipzig, 1893), the *Mitteilungen der k. Preussischen Archivverwaltung*, published periodically at Berlin since 1900. Seven numbers have already appeared, of which the first contains R. Koser, *Über den gegenwärtigen Stand der archivalischen Forschung in Preussen*. The following periodical publications are specially devoted to archivist research in the field of Prussian history:

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III. BRANDENBURG, ITS DOMINIONS AND THE ADJACENT LANDS, BEFORE THE UNION WITH PRUSSIA.

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Auswärtige Acten: I, France, 1640-85, ed. B. E. Simson; II, Netherlands, 1646-87, ed. H. Peter; III, P. 1, Austria, 1640-75; Lisola's mission etc., ed. A. F. Pribram.

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CHAPTER XXII.

THE COLONIES AND INDIA.

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CHAPTER XXIII.

EUROPEAN SCIENCE IN THE SEVENTEENTH AND
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[See also articles on *Academies*, *Alchemy*, *Botany*, *Chemistry*, *Medicine* etc., in *Encyclopædia Britannica*; and biographical articles in *Allgemeine Deutsche Biographie*, *Biographie Nouvelle*, *Dictionary of National Biography*, and similar works.]

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CHAPTER XXIV.

LATITUDINARIANISM AND PIETISM.

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CHRONOLOGICAL TABLE

OF

LEADING EVENTS MENTIONED IN THIS VOLUME.

- 1133 The Saxon North Mark (Brandenburg) conferred upon Albert the Bear.
- 1147 Foundation of Moscow.
- 1186 The Brandenburg Margraves establish a claim on Pomerania.
- 1226 The Margraves of Brandenburg acquire the Spree district.—Foundation of Berlin follows.
The Culm lands given to Hermann of Salza and the German Order.
- 1255 Building of Königsberg.
- 1311 The German Order secures Danzig.
- 1324-73 The Mark Brandenburg subject to the House of Wittelsbach.
- 1343 Peace of Kalisch between the German Order and Poland.
- 1374 The Mark Brandenburg united to the Bohemian Crown.
- 1385-8 Brandenburg mortgaged to the Margraves of Moravia.
- 1410 Polish victory over the German Knights at Tannenberg.
- 1411 First Peace of Thorn between Poland and the German Order.
- 1417 Investment of Frederick of Hohenzollern with the margravate of Brandenburg.
- 1466 The Second or Perpetual Peace of Thorn between Poland and the German Order.
- 1472 Marriage of Ivan III of Russia and the Greek Princess Sophia.
- 1473 February. The Brandenburg *Dispositio Achillea*.
- 1525 Albert of Hohenzollern, formerly High Master of the German Order, invested with the secularised duchy of Prussia.
Giovio's *Muscovy*.
- 1533 Accession of Ivan IV, afterwards crowned Tsar (1547).
- 1543 Vesalius on Human Anatomy.
- 1550 Ivan IV summons the *Sobor*.
- 1552 Russian annexation of Kazan.
- 1553 Sir Hugh Willoughby's expedition for the discovery of the Northern Passage. Foundation of the English "*Muscovy Company*."
- 1554 Russian annexation of Astrakhan.
- 1558-78 Gregory Stroganoff carries Russian colonisation beyond the Ural Mountains.
- 1560 The *Academia Secretorum Naturae* founded at Naples.
- 1561 Gottfried Kettler, last High Master of the German Order in Livonia, becomes Duke of Courland.
- 1566 Administration of the see of Magdeburg secured to Joachim Frederick of Brandenburg.

- 1569 Union of Poland and Lithuania at Lublin.
- 1582-4 The Cossack Ermak Timotheevich captures Sibir.—Russian subjugation of Siberia follows.
- 1589 Foundation of Patriarchate of Moscow.
- 1589-91 Galileo at Pisa lays foundation of the science of Dynamics.
- 1591 Francis Vieta publishes his algebraic work.
- 1595 May. Peace of Teusin between Russia, Sweden, and Poland.
- 1605 Joachim Frederick of Brandenburg obtains administratorship of ducal Prussia. Bacon's *Advancement of Learning*. Arndt's *Four Books*.
- 1605-6 Rule of Dimitri the Pretender at Moscow.
- 1608 French colony at Quebec founded by Champlain.
- 1609 Invasion of Russia by King Sigismund of Poland. Kepler publishes his development of the Copernican system of astronomy.
- 1612 Jacob Boehme's *Aurora*.
- 1613 Michael Romanoff elected Tsar.
- 1614 Treaty of Xanten regulates Brandenburg and Neuburg claims to Jülich-Cleves-Berg inheritance. Napier of Merchistoun on logarithms.
- 1616 Edict of Inquisition against Galileo's teaching of astronomy.
- 1617 Peace of Stolbova between Sweden and Russia.
- 1618 Union of the duchy of Prussia with Brandenburg.
- 1620 Bacon's *Novum Organum*.
- 1628 Harvey's *Exercitatio de Motu Cordis*.
- 1632 War between Poland and Russia. Galileo's dialogues on the Copernican theory of astronomy.
- 1634 Treaty of Polianovka between Poland and Russia.
- 1635 Truce of Stuhmsdorf between Sweden and Poland (including Prussia).
- 1637 Death of Bogislav XIV of Pomerania. Swedes remain in possession of duchy. Descartes' *Discours*. Milton's *Lycidas* written.
- 1638 Death of Cornelius Jansen. Publication of Chillingworth's *Religion of Protestants*.
- 1640 Death of George William of Brandenburg and accession of Frederick William (the Great Elector). Posthumous publication of Jansen's treatise on the theology of St Augustine.
- 1641 Truce of Stockholm between Brandenburg and Sweden. Milton's first pamphlet *Of Reformation touching Church discipline in England*.
- 1642 English commercial treaty with Portugal. Hales' *Schism and Schismatics*.
- 1644 Portuguese rising in Brazil.
- 1645 Accession of the Tsar Alexis Romanoff.
- 1646 Jeremy Taylor's *Liberty of Prophesying*.—*Travels of Olearius*.
- 1648 War between Venice and the Turks. Beginning of siege of Candia. Accession of Mohammad IV. Bishoppries of Halberstadt and Minden secured by Brandenburg. The Russian *Sobor* draws up a new Code of Laws (*Ulozhenie*).
- 1649 Portuguese Brazil Company established. Condemnation by the Sorbonne of five propositions from Jansen's *Augustinus*.
- 1650-63 Portuguese thrown back by Dutch in Ceylon and Malabar.
- 1651 English Navigation Act. English factory established at Hooghley. Hobbes' *Leviathan*.
- 1652 Abdication of Christina of Sweden and accession of Charles Gustavus. Dutch East India Company form a settlement at the Cape of Good Hope.
- 1653 John de Witt Grand Pensionary of Holland.

- 1653 Eastern Pomerania secured by Brandenburg.
Innocent X declares the five Jansenist propositions heretical.
- 1654 The Prussian League renounces its allegiance to the German Order.
The Dutch expelled from Brazil.
- 1654-6 Liturgical reforms of Nikon, Patriarch of Moscow.
- 1655 British capture of Jamaica.
- 1656 Mohammad Kiuprili Grand Vezir. Revival of the Ottoman Power.
Harrington's *Oceana*. John Wallis' *Arithmetica Infinitorum*.
- 1656-7 Pascal's *Provincial Letters*.
- 1657 War between the United Provinces and Portugal.
- 1658 Peace of Roeskilde between Sweden and Denmark.
- 1659 Stillingfleet's *Irenicon*.
- 1660 February. Death of Charles Gustavus of Sweden.
April-May. The Stewart Restoration.
May. Peace of Copenhagen between Sweden and Denmark.
October. Establishment of hereditary monarchy in Denmark in the House of Frederick III. Growth of absolutism in Denmark and Norway.
Peace of Oliva. Independence of East Prussia recognised.
- 1660-73 James, Duke of York, Lord High Admiral of England.
- 1661 January. John Keményi Prince of Transylvania. Despatch of Imperial force under Montecuculi against the Turks.
April-May. Savoy Conference.
June. Bombay ceded by Portugal to England.
August. Peace between the United Provinces and Portugal.
September. Reestablishment of the Episcopal Church of Scotland decreed.
November. Ormond appointed Lord Lieutenant of Ireland.
Death of Mazarin. Beginning of the personal rule of Louis XIV.
Defensive alliance and commercial treaty between England and Brandenburg.
Ahmad Kiuprili Grand Vezir.
New Charter granted to English East India Company.
The Scottish Rescissory Act. English Disciplinary Naval Statute.
Boyle's *Sceptical Chemist*.
- 1662 January. Death of John Keményi.
May. English Act of Uniformity.
„ Restoration of the Scottish Bishops.
June. Reinstitution of lay patronage in Scotland.
August. Secession of St Bartholomew's Day.
September. Bill for the Settlement of Ireland.
December. Treaty between Portugal and the United Provinces.
The English Company of Royal Adventurers trading to Africa (third Guinea Company) incorporated.
The Royal Society of London incorporated by charter.
- 1663 October. Settlement between Prussian Estates and the Great Elector.
„ English expedition to Guinea Coast.
The Turks under Ahmad Kiuprili advance upon western Hungary.
Milton finishes *Paradise Lost*.
- 1663-8 Butler's *Hudibras*.
- 1664 February. English seizure of Dutch possessions on the west coast of Africa.
Aug. Defeat of the Turks by Montecuculi at St Gothard. Peace of Vasvar.
English capture of New Amsterdam (New York).
First French Company trading with India founded. Colbert's First Tariff.
First Conventicle Act passed.
- 1665 January. De Ruyter recovers Goree from English occupation.
March. War between England and the United Provinces.

- 1665 June. Battle of Lowestoft.
 September. Death of Philip IV of Spain. Accession of Charles II.
 „ Bishop of Münster declares war against United Provinces.
 December. Bill for Explanation of the Act of Settlement of Ireland.
 Five Mile Act passed. The Plague in London. Dryden's *Essay of Dramatic Poesy*.
- 1665-6 Newton's discoveries in mathematics, and as to the law of Universal Gravitation.
- 1666 January. France declares war against England.
 June. The "Four Days' Battle" between the English and Dutch.
 September. The Great Fire of London.
 October. "Quadruple Alliance" of Holland, Denmark, Brandenburg and Brunswick-Lüneburg.
 Treaty of Cleves. Cleves, Mark, and Ravensberg secured by Brandenburg.
 Religious rising in Scotland put down at Rullion Green.
- 1666-7 The *Raskol* (great schism) in the Russian Church breaks out.
- 1667 February. Dutch conquest of Tobago.
 March. Secret treaty between Charles II and Louis XIV.
 May. War of Devolution between Louis XIV and the Spanish Netherlands.
 June. Dutch fleet in the Medway.
 July. Peace of Breda between England and the United Provinces.
 August. Fall of Clarendon.
 Treaty of Andrusovó between Poland and Russia.
 Colbert issues his increased tariff.
- 1668 January. Secret treaty between Louis XIV and the Emperor Leopold.
 Triple Alliance of England, United Provinces, and Sweden, against France.
 February. French conquest of Franche Comté.
 May. Peace of Aix-la-Chapelle between the Allies and France.
 Peace between Spain and Portugal. Spanish surrender of Portugal.
 Bombay handed over to the English East India Company.
- 1669 Fall of Candia, followed by the cession of Crete to the Turks.
 Abdication of John Casimir of Poland; election of Michael Wisniowiecki.
 The "Peace of Clement IX" accorded to the Jansenists.
 Stensen lectures at Paris on the Anatomy of the Brain.
- 1670 February. Accession of Christian V in Denmark and Norway. Administration of Griffenfeld.
 May-June. Secret Treaty of Dover between Louis XIV and Charles II.
 British capture of Jamaica recognised by Spain.
 Second Conventicle Act passed.
 Spinoza's *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus*. Bossuet's *Exposition de la Doctrine Catholique*.
- 1671 John Sobieski elected King of Poland.
 Administration of the Leeward and Windward Islands settled by the English Government.
Paradise Regained and *Samson Agonistes*. Quesnel's *Réflexions Morales sur le Nouveau Testament*. Malpighi and Grew on Structural Botany.
- 1672 February. William III of Orange Captain-General of the Dutch Union.
 March. Charles II's Declaration of Indulgence.
 „ War between England and the United Provinces.
 April. War between France and the United Provinces.
 May. Treaty between Louis XIV and Sweden.
 „ Invasion of the United Provinces by Louis XIV.
 „ Anglo-French naval defeat in Southwold Bay.

- 1672 June–October. Coalition of the Hague between the Emperor, Brandenburg, and Holland.
 July. William of Orange proclaimed Stadholder of Holland and Zeeland.
 August. Murder of John and Cornelius de Witt at the Hague.
 October. Treaty of Buczacz between Poland and Turkey.
 Third Guinea Company merged in Royal African Company.
 Leibniz' *Concilium Aegyptiacum*.
- 1672–8 War between Turkey and Poland.
- 1673 March. Charles' Declaration of Indulgence cancelled. Test Act passed.
 June. Dutch naval successes at Schooneveld. French take Maestricht.
 August. Battle of the Texel.
 November. The Turks defeated by John Sobieski at Khoczim.
- 1673–4 Spread of the Second Imperial Coalition against France.
- 1674 February. Treaty of London between England and the United Provinces.
 August. Indecisive battle of Senefé between William of Orange and Condé.
 December. War between Sweden and Brandenburg.
- 1675 January. Defeat of the Great Elector at Colmar.
 „ Swedish invasion of Brandenburg.
 April. Dutch victory off Messina. Death of de Ruyter.
 June. Treaty between France and Poland.
 „ Victory of the Great Elector over the Swedes at Fehrbellin.
 July. Death of Turenne.
 August. Sobieski defeats the Turks at Lemberg.
 Committee of the Privy Council supersedes Council of Trade and Plantations.
 Bishop Croft's *Naked Truth*. Dryden's *Aurengzebe* produced.
- 1675–9 War of Scania between Denmark and Sweden.
- 1676 June. Danish-Dutch naval victory over the Swedes at Öland.
 October. Treaty of Zurawna between Poland and Turkey.
 December. Swedish victory at Lund.
 Accession of the Tsar Theodore III.
 Death of the Grand Vezir Ahmad Kiuprili; succession of Kara Mustafa.
- 1677 April. Defeat of Orange at Montcassel.
 July. Victory of Charles XI of Sweden at Landskrona.
 November. Marriage of William of Orange with Princess Mary of England.
 War between Russia and Turkey.
- 1678 August. First denunciation of the Popish Plot.
 „ (to February, 1679). Peace of Nymegen.
 Emeric Tökölyi becomes the Hungarian national leader.
 The French obtain the cession of Gorée.
 Cudworth's *Intellectual System*. Dryden's *All for Love* produced.
- 1679 May. Introduction of the Exclusion Bill.
 June. Treaty of St Germain-en-Laye between Brandenburg and Sweden.
 „ Suppression of the Scottish Covenanting revolt at Bothwell Brigg.
 Treaty of Lund between Denmark and Sweden.
 The Habeas Corpus Act passed.
- 1680 Treaty of Bakchi-serai between Russia and Turkey.
 Archbishopric of Magdeburg incorporated with Brandenburg.
 Declaration of Sanquhar.
 The Exclusion Bill thrown out.
- 1681 September. French seizure of Strassburg and Casale.
 October. Assembly of Gallican Clergy.
 Peace between Russia and Turkey.
 Filmer's *Patriarcha*. Dryden's *Spanish Friar* and *Absalom and Achitophel*.
- 1682 March. The French Assembly of Clergy defines liberties of Gallican Church.

- 1682 Accession of Peter the Great. The Tsarevna Sophia Regent.
Outbreak of war between Austria and the Turks.
Brandenburg African Trading Company established at Königsberg.
Privileges of City of London and other towns attacked by the Crown.
- 1682-90 Sir John Child Governor of Bombay.
- 1683 February. Association against France formed at the Hague.
June. Rye House plot discovered. Execution of Russell and Sidney.
July. Siege of Vienna by the Turks begun.
September. Relief of Vienna by John Sobieski.
" Death of Colbert.
December. War between France and Spain.
- 1684 March. The Holy League between Austria, Poland, and Venice, against the Turks.
August. Truce of Ratisbon between France and the Empire.
The Apologetical Declaration of the Scottish recusants.
Spener's *Klagen*.
- 1685 February. Death of Charles II of England and accession of James II.
June. Risings of Monmouth and Argyll.
July. Monmouth defeated at Sedgmoor and executed.
August. Treaty of alliance between Great Elector and United Provinces.
" Recapture of Neuhausel from the Turks.
October. Revocation of the Edict of Nantes.
November. Edict of Potsdam.
- 1685-8 Reforms in English naval administration.
- 1686 March. Treaty of alliance between the Emperor and the Great Elector.
July. Formation of the Augsburg Alliance.
September. Buda recovered from the Turks.
Leibniz' on the Calculus.
- 1687 January. Tyrconnel made Viceroy in Ireland.
Feb.-May. Diplomatic mission of Dykvelt in England.
April. The Declaration of Indulgence issued.
August. Turkish overthrow at Harkány, near Mohács.
" Halifax' *Letter to a Dissenter*.
September. Venetian siege and conquest of Athens.
November. Fagel's letter on Declaration of Indulgence.
December. Restoration of Austrian ascendancy in Hungary. Coronation of Archduke Joseph.
Deposition of Mohammad IV and accession of Solyman II.
Newton's *Principia*. Pufendorf's *De habitu religionis ad vitam civilem*.
Dryden's *Hind and Panther*.
- 1688 May. Death of the Great Elector.
" Declaration of Indulgence ordered to be read in churches.
" Petition of the Seven Bishops against reading of Declaration.
June. Birth of Prince James Edward (afterwards the "Old Pretender").
" Trial and acquittal of the Seven Bishops. Invitation to William, Prince of Orange.
September. The Emperor takes Belgrade.
" Army of Louis XIV advances on the middle Rhine.
November. Landing of William of Orange at Torbay.
December. William of Orange enters London. Flight of James II, and fall of the House of Stewart.
Bossuet's *Histoire des Variations des Églises Protestantes*.
- 1689 February. Declaration of Right.
" William and Mary proclaimed King and Queen of England.

- 1689 March. Rout of the Irish Protestants at Dromore.
 „ James enters Dublin.
 April. Outbreak of war between France and Spain.
 „ The siege of Derry begun.
 „ The Scottish Convention issues Declaration offering the crown to William and Mary.
 May. The Grand Alliance formed.
 „ Parliament summoned by James meets at Dublin.
 „ The Toleration Act passed.
 July. Relief of Derry. Defeat of James' troops at Newtown Butler.
 „ Highland rising under Dundee put down at Killiecrankie.
 October. Bill of Rights passed.
 Mustafa Kiuprili Grand Vezir.
 Locke's *Two Treatises on Government*.
- 1690 July. French victory at Fleurus.
 „ Defeat of Anglo-Dutch fleet off Beachy Head.
 „ Battle of the Boyne. Second flight of James to France.
 Presbyterianism established in national Church of Scotland.
 Turkish reconquest of Servia, Widdin, and Belgrade.
 Permanent establishment of the English factory at Calcutta.
- 1691 April. French capture of Mons.
 July. Capture of Athlone by William's forces. Battle of Aughrim.
 August. Victory of Lewis of Baden at Szalankemen. Death of Mustafa Kiuprili.
 October. Treaties of Limerick.
- 1692 February. Massacre of Glencoe.
 May. Anglo-Dutch naval victory of La Hogue.
 June. French capture of Namur.
 August. William III defeated at Steinkirke. British repulse at St Malo.
 Invasion of Dauphiné by Victor Amadeus of Savoy.
- 1693 Defeat of William at Neerwinden.
 French victory of Marsaglia and invasion of Piedmont.
- 1693-4 Foundation of the National Debt and of the Bank of England.
- 1694 December. Death of Mary, Queen of England.
 Foundation of University of Halle.
 The Triennial Act passed.
- 1695 William recaptures Namur.
 Accession of the Sultan Mustafa II.
 Press Licensing Act dropped. Freedom of the Press established.
- 1695-1700 Initiation and ultimate failure of the Darien scheme.
- 1696 January. The Recoinage Act passed.
 February. English "Assassination Plot" discovered.
 August. The Duke of Savoy goes over to France.
 Death of John Sobieski of Poland.
 Conquest of Azoff by Peter the Great.
- 1697 September. Defeat of the Turks at Zenta by Prince Eugene.
 „ Peace of Ryswyk.
 Death of Charles XI of Sweden and accession of Charles XII.
 Accession of Augustus II of Poland.
 The Muscovite Embassy to the West.
 Fénelon's *Explanation of the Maxims of the Saints*. Dryden's *Alexander's Feast*.
- 1698 June. Revolt of the Russian Strieltzy.
 October. First Treaty of Partition.
 New English East India Company (General Society) incorporated.

- 1698 British African trade thrown open.
J. Collier's *Short View of the Profaneness and Immorality of the English Stage*.
- 1699 January. Peace of Carlowitz.
February. Death of Electoral Prince Joseph Ferdinand of Bavaria.
August. Accession of Frederick IV of Denmark and Norway.
September. Alliance between Denmark and Poland against Sweden.
November. Russia joins the coalition against Sweden.
Beginning of the great administrative reforms of Peter the Great.
- 1700 April. Act of Resumption of Irish grants.
May. Second Treaty of Partition.
August. Peace of Traventhal between Sweden and Denmark.
November. Death of Charles II of Spain.
" Battle of Narva.
Foundation of Berlin Academy of Sciences.
Defoe's *Two Great Questions Considered*.
- 1701 January. Coronation of Elector Frederick III of Brandenburg as Frederick I, King in Prussia.
February. Dutch Barrier fortresses occupied by French troops.
July. Outbreak of the War in Italy.
September. The Grand Alliance formed.
" Death of James II. Recognition of his son as King by Louis.
The Act of Settlement passed.
Brandenburg-Prussia gains the *privilegium de non appellando*.
Defoe's *True-born Englishman*.
- 1702 February. Prince Eugene's raid on Cremona.
March. Death of William III. Accession of Anne.
May. Charles XII in Warsaw.
July. Victory of Charles XII at Klissow. Capture of Cracow.
August. Failure of the English expedition against Cadiz.
September. Marlborough reduces Venloo.
October. Marlborough reduces Ruremonde and Liège. Rooke's capture of the Plate fleet.
Godolphin and Marlborough's Tory Ministry formed.
- 1702-5 Rising in the Cevennes.
- 1703 April. Victory of Charles XII at Pultusk.
May. Portugal joins the Grand Alliance. Vienna threatened by Villars.
September. French victory at Höchstädt.
December. The Methuen Treaty between England and Portugal.
Act of Security passed by the Scottish Parliament.
- 1704 January. Deposition of Augustus of Poland.
May-June. Marlborough's march to the Danube.
July. Stanislaus Leszczyński elected King of Poland.
August. Capture of Gibraltar, and naval battle off Velez Malaga.
" Battle of Blenheim.
November. Convention of Ilbersheim.
The English Alien Act passed.
- 1704-5 Resignation of Tory Ministers. Whig additions to the Government.
- 1705 June. Swedish victory at Gemaurhof.
October. Peterborough's reduction of Barcelona. Catalonia and Valencia adopt the Habsburg cause.
- 1706 February. Swedish victory at Fraustadt. Russian retreat.
May. Battle of Ramillies.
August. First negotiations for peace opened by Louis.
September. Eugene's victory at Turin. French evacuation of Piedmont.

- 1706 October. Swedish defeat at Kalisch.
 " Peace of Altranstädt between Sweden and Augustus of Saxony.
- 1707 March. Convention of Milan. The French abandon northern Italy.
 " Act of Union between England and Scotland passed.
 April. Defeat of the Allies at Almanza.
 August. "Perpetual Alliance" between Sweden and Prussia.
 " Failure of Eugene's attempt on Toulon.
 Prussia acquires Tecklenburg, Neuchâtel, and Valengin.
 Peter the Great introduces into Russia the "civil script."
 Vauban's *Projet d'une dîme royale*. Death of Vauban.
- 1708 July. Battle of Oudenarde.
 " Victory of Charles XII at Holowczyn.
 September. Swedish rout at Lyesna.
 " English capture of Minorca.
 Permanent union of the two English East India Companies.
- 1708-9 Oct.-Feb. March of Charles XII through Severia and the Ukraine.
- 1708-10 Civil war in San Paulo. Portuguese organisation of district.
- 1709 May. Peace negotiations. The "Preliminaries" rejected by Louis.
 " Charles XII lays siege to Poltawa.
 June. Battle of Poltawa. Revival of the northern league against Sweden.
 September. Battle of Malplaquet.
 October. Alliance between Russia and Denmark against Sweden.
 " First Dutch Barrier Treaty.
- 1709-14 Charles XII in Turkey.
- 1710 March. Negotiations at Gertruydenberg.
 July. Victory of the Allies at Almenara.
 August. Victory of the Allies at Saragossa.
 December. Defeat of the Allies at Brihuega.
 " Indecisive battle of Villa Viciosa.
 Impeachment of Sacheverell and fall of the Whigs. Tory Ministry of Harley and St John formed.
- 1711 March. War between Russia and Turkey.
 April. Death of the Emperor Joseph I.
 August. Peace of the Pruth between Russia and Turkey.
 October. Election of the Emperor Charles VI.
 December. Dismissal of Marlborough.
 Plague in Copenhagen.
- 1712 January. Opening of peace negotiations at Utrecht.
 February. Death of the Duke of Burgundy.
 March. Death of the Duke of Brittany.
 July. Separate armistice between England and France.
 " French victory at Denain.
 December. Swedish victory over the Danes at Gadebusch.
 Swift's *Remarks on the Barrier Treaty*.
- 1713 January. Second Dutch Barrier Treaty.
 February. Death of Frederick I of Prussia.
 April. Peace of Utrecht.
 May. Swedish capitulation at Oldensworth.
 July. Peace of Adrianople.
 Issue of the Bull *Unigenitus*.
 Dumont's *Letter to an Englishman*.
- 1714 March. Peace of Rastatt.
 " Battle of Storkyro. Russia overruns Finland.
 May. The Schism Act.

- 1714 August. Death of Queen Anne. Accession of George I.
September. Peace of Baden.
- 1715 February. Peace between Spain and Portugal.
May-June. Third Coalition against Sweden between Great Britain (Hanover), Denmark, and Prussia.
September. Death of Louis XIV.
November. Third Dutch Barrier Treaty.
December. Fall of Stralsund.
- 1716 Treaty of Danzig between Russia and Mecklenburg-Schwerin.
- 1716-7 Russian expedition into Central Asia.
- 1718 December. Death of Charles XII of Sweden.
The viceroyalty of New Granada created.
- 1719 First Russian envoy in Peking.
- 1719-20 Nov.-Feb. Treaties of Stockholm.
- 1720 July. Peace of Frederiksborg between Sweden and Denmark.
- 1721 August. Peace of Nystad between Sweden and Russia.
October. Peter the Great declared Emperor.
- 1722 Russian expansion in the Caspian provinces of Persia.
Ostend Company chartered.
Moravian community founded at Herrnhut.
- 1724 February. Treaty of Stockholm between Russia and Sweden.
June. Treaty of Constantinople between Russia and Turkey.
- 1725 January. Death of Peter the Great.
February. Accession of Catharine I.
Anglo-Franco-Prussian Treaty of Herrenhausen (Hanoverian Alliance).
- 1726 August. Russia joins Austro-Spanish League.
- 1727 April. Treaty of Copenhagen between Denmark, England, and France.
May. Death of Catharine I. Accession of Peter II.
- 1729 Treaty of Seville between England, France, and Spain.
- 1730 January. Death of Peter II and accession of Anne.
- 1731 Ostend Company suppressed.

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